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ABSTRACT

This book, which can be used in secondary and college courses, is the first of two volumes which present an Indian view of India and the world. The reality of everyday life as experienced by the Indian people is recreated in the series. Almost all of the material in both volumes has been written by Indians and has been taken from a variety of sources: autobiographies, fiction, poetry, newspaper and magazine articles, and historical documents. Volume one focuses on the most personal aspects of Indian life: family relations, marriage, caste membership, and religious beliefs. Each primary source selection is preceded by an editor's introduction which provides background information and a few questions for class discussion. Examples of selections include the following. Indian family life is compared with American family life. Ravi Shankar (the world famous sitar player) describes the ideal relationship between the student and his guru. One selection tells how an upper class, well-educated family arranges the marriage of their eldest daughter. Dowries are the topic of one reading. In another, an Indian journalist analyzes the concept of woman power in India showing that the expectations for men and women are quite different. An Indian girl describes to her brother how their mother used stories to educate her. An imaginary conversation between an American teacher and an Indian businessman will help students understand the caste system. Several readings attempt to clarify some of the religious concepts of the Hindu way of life. (Author/RM)

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THROUGH INDIAN EYES

Volume 1

The Wheel of Life

Revised Edition

DONALD J. JOHNSON

and

JEAN E. JOHNSON

LEON E. CLARK, General Editor

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To Professor and Mrs. P. Lal, who helped us to see through Indian eyes.

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Foreword

PEOPLE—AND NATIONS—have a tendency to look at the outside world from their own perspectives. This is natural and perhaps necessary, for we are all prisoners of a particular space and time. But how limited and boring one perspective can be! And how faulty and biased our information would be if we listened only to ourselves!

The main goal of *Through Indian Eyes* is to broaden our perspective by presenting an Indian view of India and the world. Almost all of the material in these two books has been written by Indians. The material has been taken from a variety of sources: autobiographies, fiction, poetry, newspaper and magazine articles, and historical documents.

Unlike most books about "other peoples," *Through Indian Eyes* does not try to *explain* India but to *show* it; it does not offer "expert" analysis by outside observers but, rather, attempts to recreate the reality of everyday life as experienced by the Indian people. Interpretation is left to the reader. In effect, *Through Indian Eyes* has two objectives: to let the Indians speak for themselves, and to let readers think for themselves.

Volume 1, *The Wheel of Life,* focuses on the most personal aspects of Indian life: family relations, marriage, caste membership, and religious beliefs. A special effort has been made to show the integration of Hindu beliefs and everyday life.

Volume 2, "Forging a Nation," moves to the larger circle of nation-building, dealing with such issues as Hindu-Muslim relations, the impact of British colonial rule, and the influence of Mahatma Gandhi on the independence movement. The last section of the book examines the broad areas of national unity, political philosophy and economic development; it includes material on the "language question," the Indian constitution and parliamentary system, and agriculture and industrialization. The interaction of tradition and change underlies the entire volume.

In some ways, India may seem different from the United States, and indeed it is. But in many more ways, the Indians as people are similar to people anywhere in the world. Human beings, no matter where they live, face the same basic needs: to eat, to work, to love, to play, to get along with other people and with their environments. Learning how the Indians respond to these needs may teach us something useful for our own lives.

More importantly, getting to know the Indians as people -- sharing in their thoughts and feelings, their beliefs, and aspirations — should help us to develop a sense of empathy, a feeling of identity, with human beings everywhere. In the end we should know more about ourselves — indeed, we should have an expanded definition of who we are — because we will know more about the common humanity that all people share. Self-knowledge is the ultimate justification for studying about other people.

LEON E. CLARK

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LEON E. CLARK
DONALD J. JOHNSON
JEAN E. JOHNSON

Introduction

"What *is* India?" the teacher asked.

Hands went up all around the room. "It's in Asia," one student offered.

"Is it?" the teacher replied.

"It's a subcontinent in Asia, bounded by the Himalayas, the Indian Ocean, and the Bay of something."

"No, not that," the teacher said.

"It's a country where people are segregated into castes and can't eat together or choose who they'll marry."

"No."

"It's a land where most of the people are Hindus and their prime minister is a woman."

"No, that's not India."

Fewer hands now. "I think it's a poor country where the people live in villages and die a lot."

"No," smiled the teacher. "Not that."

"Isn't it an Asian country where the people are either very rich or very poor?"

"Ahhh," moaned one boy in the back. "He's going to say, 'No, not that.' I know what the answer is. There *is* no India!"

In reply, the teacher said, "Let me tell you an old Indian story. There was once a king who tried to explain what a chariot was to an old man. 'Is it the wheels?' asked the old man.

'No,' said the King. 'Is it the axle? the yoke? the reins? the chariot-body?' Each time the King answered 'No.' 'Then,' said the old man, 'king though you are, you are lying to me. There is no chariot.' "

"The King wasn't really lying, of course, because the chariot was more than any one of its parts—or a collection of them. So too with India. We shall be trying to understand what India *is*, but India will always be more than the parts we choose to study."

As the late Prime Minister Nehru once said, "India contains all that is disgusting and all that is noble. You take your choice." We must choose what to study about this country, which is as complex as any continent, with almost three times as many people as the United States, 3,000 "ethnic" groups, 15 official languages, all the world's religions, and a history that goes back 4,500 years. Anything we choose to study about India will be only part of the story of this complex nation.

A poem based on an ancient Indian text makes this last point very well.

It was six men of Indostan
   To learning much inclined
Who went to see the Elephant
   (Though all of them were blind),
That each by observation
   Might satisfy his mind.

The First approached the Elephant
   And happening to fall
Against his broad and sturdy side
   At once began to bawl:
"Bless me! but the Elephant
   Is very like a wall."

The Second, feeling of the tusk,
   Cried, "Ho! What have we here,
So very round and smooth and sharp?
   To me 'tis mighty clear
This wonder of an Elephant
   Is very like a spear."

The Third approached the animal,
And happening to take
The squirming trunk within his hands,
Thus boldly up and spake:
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a snake."

The Fourth reached out his eager hand
And felt about the knee.
"What most this wondrous beast is like
Is mighty plain," quoth he;
"Tis clear enough the Elephant
Is very like a tree."

The Fifth, who chanced to touch the ear,
Said, "E'en the blindest man
Can tell what this resembles most;
Deny the fact who can,
This marvel of an Elephant
Is very like a fan."

The Sixth no sooner had begun
About the beast to grope
Than, seizing on the swinging tail
That fell within his scope,
"I see," quoth he, "the Elephant
Is very like a rope."

And so these men of Indostan
Disputed loud and long,
Each in his own opinion
Exceeding stiff and strong,
Though each was partly in the right,
And all were in the wrong.*

India is a nation of many nations, for the states in India are like countries in Europe. Despite great diversity in culture, language, and life-style, India is *one* nation. It is like a vast garden with many species of flowers. Prime Minister Gandhi has said:

---

* James Godfrey Saxe, "The Six Blind Men and the Elephant."

> Many crises and dangers from within and without have obstructed our path but we have taken them in our stride. . . . What holds people together is not religion, not race, not language, not even a commitment to an economic system. It is shared experience and involvement in the conscious and continuous effort at resolving internal differences through political means. It is a sense of "Indianness" which unites our people despite ethnic, linguistic, and religious diversity.*

What is this "Indian-ness"? Perhaps it lies in a shared mythological past. Indians know their own nation as *Bharat*, after a hero of the great epic the *Mahabharata*. When Mahatma Gandhi talked about re-establishing *Ram-rajya*, Indians knew he meant a society like the one Rama ruled in the epic *Ramayana*. Hindus travel all over India on religious pilgrimages. An illustration accompanying a magazine article proposing a mammoth development plan to link up the major rivers in India has a picture of Shiva in the corner; every Indian knows that this refers to the story of that great god's catching the sacred Ganges River in his hair. Even Muslims share this past. "They are Indians," one hears Hindus say. "They are the same as us, but they were converted."

One of the great strengths of Hinduism is its ability to absorb new forms, new people, and new ideas and still retain its identity. This has allowed India to change, grow, and yet preserve its traditions. Because of the importance of the Hindu tradition to Indian life, this first volume is focused on the Hindu way of life.

As the Indian scholar Percival Spear has written, Hinduism is "a body of customs and a body of ideas, the two together having such pervasive power and defensive force as to absorb or to resist passively for centuries any system which comes in contact with it."† The customs and ideas with which this volume deals relate to the individual, the family, and the community as part of the cycle of life.

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* Indira Gandhi, "India and the World," *Foreign Affairs*, 51 (October, 1972), 65–66.

† Percival Spear, *India, Pakistan and the West* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1967), p. 35.

In traditional Hindu society, people were born into various social levels, referred to as "castes." Each group had its own appropriate duties (*dharma*). These caste groups were not equal, but no one caste was more important than any other in the scheme of things. The group a young child was born into determined his job in later life, the kind of person he would marry, the religious rituals he would perform, even the deity he would worship.

One way to think of the contrast between Hindu society and American society is to consider the differences between chess and checkers. An American child is taught that "all men are created equal," like the checkers on a checkerboard. Although, as the late President John F. Kennedy once said, "Life is unfair," an American child is taught to believe that his opportunities are essentially like everyone else's. It is up to him to decide what to do with his life.

The ideal Indian child, by contrast, might better be likened to a piece in a game of chess. In chess, the nature of the piece determines what kinds of moves it can make. A bishop, for example, can move diagonally, and only in that way. It isn't that moving straight up or across is any better or worse; it's just inappropriate for a bishop. So inappropriate, in fact, that were that piece to move like a castle, there could be no game. As the Hindu scriptures say repeatedly, "It is better to do your own duty, though imperfectly, than to do another's duty well."

The age, or the stage of life, in which a Hindu happens to be living also helps to determine appropriate behavior. Traditionally, the life of a man had four stages. First came the student stage, when the young man was forbidden to enjoy sex and did exactly as his *guru* (teacher) told him to do. Then came marriage and the householder stage. After his children were grown and his hair began to turn gray, a man could forsake his home and family and seek *moksha* (oneness with God) in the forest. Finally, in the last stage of life, he left the forest and became a wandering sage—one who had experienced *moksha* and now would teach others.

For the Indian woman, there were also appropriate stages, but they differed from those of the man. The young Indian girl did not usually go to a *guru* for instruction but learned her roles from her mother and other women in the household. She served as wife in the householder stage but seldom went into the forest or renounced the worldly life. After her children were old enough to marry she assumed the role of mother-in-law. Some Indians explain the fact that few women seek *moksha* as men do by saying that woman already knows what man must find out; the life process within a woman as she experiences the creation of a child is that oneness with God and nature that man seeks in the forest.

Few, if any, individuals live out their society's goals to the letter. In America, not everyone follows the teachings of the Sermon on the Mount or gets to be President; nevertheless, the ideals form a basis of action. In India, not everyone adheres to an abstract *dharma* or follows the stages of life, but these ideals exert an influence on the daily behavior of Indians.

This volume tries to suggest the interplay between some aspects of Hindu culture and the daily lives of Indians (what some scholars call "text and context"). You will be introduced to the major events in the cycle of life in India. What is family life like? How are the young trained? How are marriage partners selected? What are the responsibilities of men and women? What is the good life? As you consider how Indian society answers these questions, we hope that you will also consider how American society deals with the same problems of living.

Families Are Different in India

Editors' Introduction: This joyous mother's song suggests how many people are involved in an Indian child's birth. "In India you have got to be connected," an Indian remarked. The most important connection, at birth and throughout life, is an individual's family, and so our story of India begins with the family.

Husband, call the midwife quickly,
Let my child be delivered.

Husband, call the barber's wife quickly,
Get the four-wick lamp lighted in my palace.

Husband, call my mother-in-law soon,
Beat the golden plate in my palace. . . .

Husband, give sister-in-law lovingly what's due to her,
And fulfill all customs with double measure.[*]

How does an Indian family differ from an American family? The novelist Santha Rama Rau suggests some answers in this first selection. What is your attitude toward relatives who come to visit in your home? What does "mother-in-law" mean in the United States? in India?

Excerpt from "Families Are Different in India," by Santha Rama Rau, *The Reader's Digest*, August, 1965. Copyright 1965 by The Reader's Digest Assn., Inc. Used with permission.

[*] Song 89, *Women's Folk-Songs of Rajputana*, compiled by L. Winifred Bryce, The Publications Division, Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, New Delhi, 1964. Reprinted by permission.

SO OFTEN IN the years I have lived in America, I have heard the pleasant inquiry, "How is your family?" It makes me realize that it is virtually impossible to translate the question into my native language, Hindi. In India, you would ask, "Is everyone well in your house?"

The point is that almost never do we, in India, use the word "family" in the American way, meaning, perhaps, only a husband and wife and their children. In India, a family would mean something much closer to a clan, including numerous near and distant relatives. This odd fact of language illustrates the profound difference in the family life of the two countries. In the Indian household, with all its diverse relationships, you learn to become a part of the world that surrounds you.

I once quoted to an American friend a familiar Indian saying, "Every Hindu girl's ambition is to be a mother-in-law." My friend looked puzzled. "Why a mother-in-law?" she asked.

Whatever rights may be denied a Hindu woman by society, in the intricate and all-embracing domain of her home, she is supreme. Living with a husband and wife often will be all their sons and daughters-in-law, all their grandchildren, and possibly, if the grandsons are old enough to be married, there will be the great-grandchildren as well. The senior woman in the home, the mother-in-law, controls this empire—which requires all her skill, tact, and administrative competence.

Besides the immediate members of the family, there will also be distant relatives who, for one reason or another, have a right to be part of this large family organization—a widowed cousin, an uncle without a family of his own, or a maiden aunt. Relatives from near and far have the right to come and "visit" for a week, six months, the rest of their lives, and nobody will question their presence. After all, what is a family *for*?

I can remember from my grandmother's household an elderly cousin who used to visit us daily. He came to our house, not to share our company, but because he was too stingy to buy his own newspaper. At six every evening, a chair would

Life in the south Indian courtyard is never dull. Here a visiting nurse talks with family members. (United Nations)

be set out for him in our garden, our newspaper on it, weighted down with a stone to keep the rising night breeze from disarranging it. He would arrive, settle himself comfortably, enjoy the lovely colors of the Indian evening, read the paper, and then leave. Often, he would not exchange a word with any member of the household. Why should he? In the Indian view, the horizons of a family should be wide. No one in the family, and certainly not an older member, is ever thrown on the discard heap. All remain cherished and respected members.

When I first returned to India after four years at Wellesley College, my family was bursting with curiosity about my exotic adventures in that "new" country, America. The question that interested me most came from a very old relative, a lady who was partly deaf and nearly blind. "Tell me," she said, "is it really true that some old women in America live alone?"

"Yes," I admitted. "There isn't always room for old people in the household of a newly married couple."

"Oh," she said, "how very sad!"

"But the old people often prefer to have a place of their own."

"I wasn't talking about the *old*," she told me in a sharply impatient voice. "I meant, how very sad for the *young*."

No wonder there is no true equivalent in India for the word "family" in the American sense. In every Asian family there is not only space but necessity for all these many relationships and their diverse contributions. The Indian household encompasses a consideration of a world of people that may not be to every member's taste—but all of whom deserve equal consideration.

In Grandmother's House

While studying at Wellesley College, Miss Rau acquired some American values and attitudes. Her grandmother is naturally more Indian in her ways, and conflicts between the two result when Santha returns to India after her long stay in the United States. What is there about Miss Rau's behavior that shocks her grandmother? What does this selection suggest about the role of women in India?

I FOUND AFTER a few days that in her own indirect way she was trying to instill in me something of the traditional Hindu girl's attitude to the household, the rest of the family, and living in general. The servants were the first problem that came up. Whenever the telephone rang, one of the servants would run to answer it. They were unanimously terrified of the instrument

From *Home to India* by Santha Rama Rau: pp. 13–16, 17–18. Copyright, 1944, by Vasanthi Rama Rau. By permission of Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

and would hold the receiver well away from the ear and scream "Allo?"

Naturally unless the caller and the name of the person who was being called were both very familiar to the servant, nothing was understood or accomplished. After watching this procedure for some time, I began to sprint for the telephone, too, whenever it rang. As long as I won it was all right, but occasionally I would reach it at the same time as the houseboy. The first time this happened he grasped the receiver and ignored my outstretched hand. I asked him please to let me answer the phone in future if I were in the house—this in very polite if halting Hindustani. I used the formal form of "you" as I would have to any stranger.

Afterwards my grandmother called me into her room. In her own mysterious way she had overheard the conversation and wanted now to warn me against treating the servants in such a way again.

"They are not your equals, so do not treat them as such. It is not enough for the servants to be frightened of you; that fear must be founded on respect. This pandering to them is some unreasonable sentimentality you have picked up in the west. It embarrasses them as much as it irritates me. . . ."

She went on to explain that one could retain a feeling of equality (tinged all the same with condescension) for the cook, because he, after all, had to be a Brahmin—one of our own caste—as he handled the food. By all means we should give the servants medicines if they were sick, see that their children were well treated, visit their quarters and make sure that their rooms were kept clean, even give their children an education—which they would never get if it were left to their families—but we should always keep our social distance.

Then there was the matter of prayers in the mornings. My grandmother was always up by five o'clock and said her prayers, decorated the images in her shrine, and sang the hymns of the day at that time. She would light a little ceremonial fire, throw spices and something that smelled like incense on it; when the fire died she rubbed her fingers in the ash and smeared it on her forehead. . . . The other women of the house were expected to join her, though there was no expressed compulsion. After a few days of this I decided that if I expected to be able to stay awake after nine at night I must stop keeping these hours.

One afternoon I told my grandmother that the prayers were meaningless to me except as a curiosity, that I could make no sense of the hymns, which were sung in Sanskrit (I'm pretty certain they were incomprehensible to her also), and that I felt I was too old to be converted to Hinduism now.

She assured me briskly that even if I wanted to, I could not be reconverted to Hinduism, and that no such expectation had prompted her to suggest that I come to prayers with her. I had been born a Hindu, but since I had crossed water, eaten beef, neglected to wear my caste mark, and committed innumerable other offenses, I had lost my right to both my religion and my caste.

"But don't assume from that that you may marry anyone outside the Brahmin caste!" The real reason, it turned out, for this religious indoctrination had been to show me something of the values by which Indians live. . . .

I was growing impatient because I had invited a friend to tea, it was dangerously near tea time, and I had yet to change.

"Is it all right," I asked my grandmother casually, "if I have a friend to tea?" It was a very informal meal and Asha frequently had girls from her school to it, so I didn't think there would be any objections.

"Perfectly all right, my child, if she is a suitable friend."

"Well, it's a he. I should think he's suitable. He traveled over from South Africa with us. Mother liked him."

I have never seen anyone look as shocked as my grandmother did then.

"The more I see of you girls the more amazed I am at your mother for the extraordinary education she has given you, and above all for allowing such outrageous behavior from any girl in our family!"

"I don't think this concerns her at all," I said, surprised. "Because, she could scarcely have kept us in a vacuum during all those years in England—particularly when she was away so much of the time!"

"That is exactly what I told her. You should never have been taken to England. You should have been left here in our care."

"But we wanted—"

"Don't argue with me, my dear child. I will discuss this with your mother."

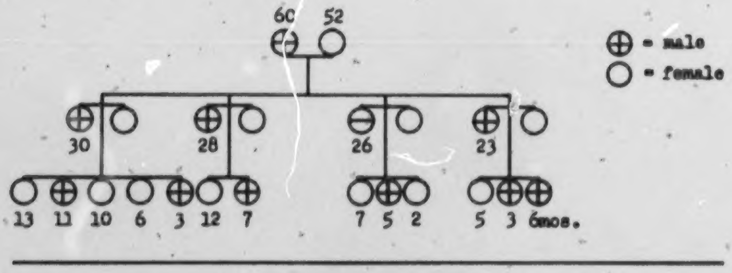
I turned to leave the room. "Well, shall I call him up and tell him not to come?"

"Of course you cannot do that. If you have invited him already, we are obliged to extend hospitality to him. But while I am the head of this house it will not happen again."

Twigs Are Bent Differently

Editors' Introduction: The Indian joint family, even a modern one like Santha Rama Rau's, is large and complex. Within the family, each member has a different role, and the lines of authority are clear. The oldest man in the family has the greatest status and power. His wife supervises the activities within the household. Ideally the sons and their wives all live in the same compound. In the home a wife is subject to the power and authority of her husband's mother, which explains why most Indian women look forward to becoming mothers-in-law. The children tend to look upon each other as brothers and sisters rather than as cousins. Their differences in age are more important distinctions than their actual blood relationship. The children also tend to regard all older women as mothers and older men as fathers.

A diagram of an extended family might look like the one below. The age of each family member is listed below the symbol that



indicates his or her sex. In this family there are four sons who have a total of thirteen children. As the seven granddaughters marry, they will join their husbands in other joint families. The six grandsons will add their wives to this family.

The setting for most of the family's activities is the roofless courtyard in the center of the house. Many homes in India should really be called enclosures, for they encircle a bit of earth and sky rather than shutting them out. The courtyard is open to the heavens. The rooms surrounding it provide privacy and storage space; they are seldom used as areas to live in.

What about the quality of life "inside the courtyard"? How does it compare with life in an American home, where typically only mother, father, and children live? The following selection is an attempt to compare some of the experiences of an eight-year-old American boy and a six-year-old Indian boy, named Babu. The selection was written by the American's father after he and his family had visited Babu's joint family in a north Indian village. What do you think are the advantages of each type of family life? The disadvantages?

AN AMERICAN CHILD and his nuclear family stand out in bold relief when seen in the midst of an Indian joint family going about its daily round in the courtyard. It is easy to tell who the American boy's mother and father are. Babu, the Indian boy, one of thirteen children in the courtyard, is surrounded by four women. Judging from his attitude toward them and their attitudes toward him, any one of them could be his mother.

In fact, however, Babu's mother is not even in the courtyard. She is visiting her family in another village. Babu has chosen to stay with his aunts, who share in his care. At various times one of them may give him water, another feed him, another pick him up after a fall, and still another make room for him on her *charpoy* (string cot) at night.

The American boy, although only eight years old, has a clear sense of "mine," by which he means things that belong to him and to him alone. You may borrow his pencil or matchbox cars, but you must ask first and must be sure to return them. Even space is included in his possessions. At night, when the

By Donald J. Johnson.

charpoys are put out, the American assumes that he'll have "his" bed, or at least share Daddy's.

For Babu, in contrast, the bed and all other possessions in the courtyard belong to everyone. Toys bought at a fair are passed from cousin to cousin, brother to brother. As they disintegrate, their pieces are also shared. At one such fair, Babu had been given money to buy a few sweets, which he was eating with evident relish. A younger cousin climbed off his mother's lap, swept the sweets out of Babu's hand, and returned with them to his mother. Babu made no protest. He simply followed the younger child and started eating the sweets from *his* hand. He did not complain, nor did any aunt scold the younger child for taking what "wasn't his."

Babu is learning that "mine" means what belongs to the family and no one else. "Mine" extends to the limit of the courtyard, which his mother and aunts seldom leave. He learns from his grandmother's attitude that no one is to come into the courtyard or take anything out of it unless he is a family member. He hears the family justify the exploits of a young uncle, which include stealing a bicycle and some jewelry; the blame is put on someone outside the family. He realizes that his aunts will feed any member of the family but no one else unless it's a special feast day. For Babu, "me" and "mine" mean family.

Individuality is another thing that is different in the courtyard. The American boy tries to learn the names of Babu's aunts and discovers that they are all called *Bahu,* which means "daughter-in-law." One is "oldest daughter-in-law"; one is "middle daughter-in-law"; one "next to youngest"; another "youngest." Babu similarly refers to other children in the courtyard as "oldest brother" or "middle brother." Individuality does not seem to be as important as position in the family. Each member seems to know his place and over whom he has authority.

The American boy has a vivid sense of time. How often he hears, "It's time to go to bed" or "Wash up, it's time to eat."

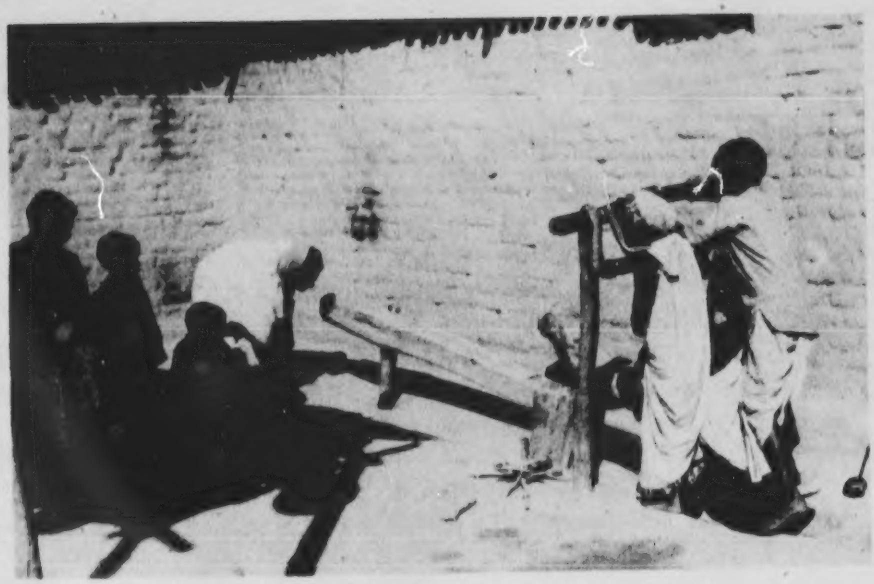
He has learned to ask, "Mommy, is it time for dinner?" All his life he has done things on time. There is a time for watching *Sesame Street*, a time for school, a time for play, and a time for bed.

In the courtyard, the American boy realizes, each person goes to bed when he is tired, even the very young. For Babu, the only time is the time it happens to be. There are far more important motivations than Daddy's watch. Chances are there isn't even a watch in the courtyard. Babu's stomach tells him when it is time to eat, and he is served a meal. Babu's heavy eyelids tell him when it is time for sleep, and he crawls into the nearest *charpoy*. He is welcomed by whoever is already there, and he will probably make room for others as the night progresses.

Another thing the American boy notices is the lack of distinction between work and play. They seem to run together in the courtyard, and the result causes him to remark, "I like it here; there is always something to do." He is used to hearing, "Finish your work and then you can go out and play." Or, more likely, "Finish your work or you can't play."

For Babu, however, life is more flowing. He watches cousins pounding the wheat and waits eagerly for a turn with the heavy wooden pounding rod. He goes out to gather dung for the fuel cakes because it's something to do. Happily, he follows his father and uncles to the fields to glean after the harvest, thus beginning his apprenticeship as a farmer. He learns, without knowing he is receiving a lesson, from the actions of the older children and the older men. He is not told; he watches and copies.

The American boy, on the other hand, is constantly being told how to act. "Be good." "Don't forget to say thank you." "Help with the work." He has been hearing this sort of advice as long as he can remember. He senses somehow that he could always be a little better, work a little harder. There seems to be an abstract image for him and him alone that he has to live up to but which is never quite defined. His actions somehow



South Indian children help their mother thresh rice in the family courtyard. (United Nations)

reflect on his parents, and they are anxious that he should "measure up."

"Measure up to what?" Babu might ask. Babu does not know this tension between parent and child. For Babu, there is no talk of what he is to be when he grows up. He will be a farmer. If the family wants him to be something else—say, a tube-well operator, or a tractor driver—he will do that. But those decisions will come later and will be made by the family. He is not reminded of the future, of *becoming*. He *is*.

Babu is also saved from competition for parental love. When there is just a father and a mother, the American boy finds that he must jealously fight for his position in their affections. Babu has the attention of at least five adult women in the courtyard, and one of them is bound to think that what he has done is wonderful. Someone will notice his mood. One morning his grandmother observed that he was out of sorts. Without a word she filled his shirt front with grain, which he exchanged for popcorn balls with the local grain parcher. He returned to the courtyard with his sweets and a broad grin. "Too permissive," we would have said if it had happened to our son. "Don't spoil the child. He shouldn't be rewarded for surliness, and anyway he's *my* son. Grandmother shouldn't interfere with his training." Abstract standards again. Babu's life has more of a flow to it.

A wise Indian once said that a child's life is largely dream play and fantasy; it must not be disturbed too much by what we consider reality or the child will not develop into the next stage. The American's development is not fantasy; it's Dr. Spock and Dr. Gesell. If a child is one year old, he walks; if he is two, he must be toilet-trained and should be talking. The parents, and through them the child, are hard put to meet the deadlines. Babu walked when he could and nursed as long as there was milk and the urge remained. Very gradually he learned to imitate the men who went outside the courtyard to relieve themselves. From the very beginning, there was no abstract standard for becoming. Babu was allowed to be.

Babu's life seems to have great freedom compared to the American boy's. No parent hovers over Babu to make sure he is good. There are no abstract standards of success set before him, either in the courtyard or in school. No one checks his actions, outside of an occasional head count to make sure he is still around. He seems to have fewer pressures, no worry about learning the tables or the reading words, no concern about his future success. Within the limits of the family and the village, Babu's life is filled with freedom.

Yet the limits of the village and family are real, and they impose restrictions on Babu that his American counterpart will never know. Babu is being trained to imitate, to submit to the decisions of the family, especially the elders. He has seen family member after family member follow the decisions of the head of the courtyard. One son gave up an important meeting to take a family member's ashes to the Ganges River. Another son first went for training in the Punjab and then, with equal acceptance, returned to life in the village when directed to do so by his family. Sons and daughters have accepted the spouses chosen for them. Babu is learning the lesson that family loyalty and obedience come first.

The American boy seems on the surface to have a much more restricted life; yet he is learning that it is his own decision-making that is important. He must think for himself, become something on his own. From the example of those around him and from his experience in places far from home, he is realizing that he has a world-wide range of choice.

Dharma

Editors' Introduction: In the previous reading, we saw how Babu was learning by example that his primary duty was to obey the decisions of his family. Another source of training is the stories told to the young. It is not uncommon to hear an Indian remark, "I learned more from my grandmother than from my school." Countless Indian children have listened as their grandmothers filled the evenings with stories from the ancient Hindu epics, some of which go back three thousand years.

Many of the stories are about Rama, the hero of the epic *Ramayana*. Rama is held up as the ideal son because of some of the qualities he exhibits in the following episode. How does Rama react to the news that he will be crowned? that he will be banished? How would you have reacted to such news?

The Banishment of Rama

AYODHYA LAY NORTH of the Ganges, where the land was rich and fertile. The roads around Ayodhya were broad and even, shaded by trees and dotted with wells. The people were ruled by a wise and just king, Dashratha, and their contentment was complete when, after many years, King Dashratha's wives were blessed with sons: Rama, Bharata, Lakshmana and Satrughna.

All four brothers were trained in the arts of statecraft,

Adapted from Swami Chinmayananda and Kimari Bharathi Naik, *Bala Ramayanam* (Madras: Chinmaya Publications Trust, n.d.), pp. 21–27.

archery, and warfare, and in the wisdom of the ancient books. Rama, the eldest, was the favorite of the people. If only we all had sons like Rama. Would that all fathers were so blessed.

And what a wife Rama had! Sita, as faithful as she was beautiful, was the ideal partner. All was at peace in the kingdom, and Dashratha summoned his advisers to him one day and said: "I am growing old. It is time I retire from worldly concerns and seek truth. Rama is loved by all. He is my first-born son and should now assume the responsibilities of leadership."

The advisers agreed, and Rama was summoned. King Dashratha told him he was to be crowned and charged him: "Protect your subjects, fight your foes, and be always faithful to your duty." Rama's face was calm and serene as he received this news. He touched his father's feet and humbly accepted his decision. "I am in duty bound to do as you say," he said.

Ayodhya went mad with joy. Their beloved prince was to be crowned. Halls were decorated, trumpets blared, flags flew from the housetops. In the palace, everything was prepared for the coronation.

But later that night, all this changed. Bharata's mother, King Dashratha's second and favorite wife, desired that her son be crowned and Rama banished. She recalled that once, years ago, the King had promised her any two wishes. At the time she had desired nothing. Now, reminding the King of his promise, she demanded that Bharata become king and Rama be banished. Dashratha was stunned; in vain he begged his pretty queen to ask for anything else. She could not be moved. A king must keep his word, so Dashratha had no choice but to grant her demands. Rama was summoned once more.

As Rama entered his stepmother's room, he saw his father lying motionless on the ground, too pained to speak. The Queen spoke for him: "Long ago your father offered me two boons. I want him to grant them now. Bharata is to be crowned in your place and you are to go into exile for fourteen years."

Rama received this order with the utmost calm. He looked steadily at the Queen and said, "Is that all? I shall indeed be happy if Bharata ascends the throne, He is the most noble of princes. As for going into exile, it is but a small thing for me,

Fireworks frequently mark the celebration of an Indian holiday. Here Rama destroys effigies of his enemies. (United Nations) who am ready to lay down my life if need be to help my father discharge a sacred duty."

Calm and controlled, Rama left, after touching the feet of Dashratha and his queen. Lakshmana, standing outside, had heard all. His eyes were red with anger as he followed Rama. Furiously, his fist clenched tightly around his bow, he cried out, "As long as there is breath in this body, I shall fight to see that Rama sits on the throne. I shall kill anyone who stands in his way."

Rama answered calmly, "Lakshmana, do not get so heated. You know very well that I shall obey my father to the last word. It is my first and foremost duty. Let us therefore do what father bids cheerfully and with a smile on our lips."

Lakshmana, however, was not to be pacified. He stormed again. "What! Does the old King think of fulfilling his word to his queen and not the word given to his son? He has come under evil counsel. It is the *dharma* ["duty"] of a *Kshatriya* [a member of the warrior and ruler caste] to fight evil and establish good. My bow and arrow, sword, and broad shoulders are not for appearance only. Today the world shall see the might of Lakshmana's arm!"

Rama only soothed Lakshmana, saying, "So long as our parents are alive, it is our foremost duty to obey them. Let us not be swayed by emotion. Let us think clearly and follow the path of *dharma*."

"*We Are* We . . ."

Dharma is a concept we will meet again and again in our study of India. It can be translated roughly as "duty" or "appropriate action." In Hindu thought everyone and everything has a *dharma*. In the physical world this is called an object's properties. In the world of social relations, it is one's duty. If you are a son, your

From the book *Challenges in India* by Taya Zinkin, published by Walker & Company, Inc., New York, N.Y. © 1966 by Taya Zinkin, p. 187.

dharma is to obey your elders, even if it means banishment. In the classical Hindu tradition, you must do your *dharma* no matter how you feel about it personally. Does anyone ask the rain whether it wants to fall? Can you imagine a lake acting like rain? In the words of the *Bhagavad Gita*, a sacred Hindu text:

> Better do your own task imperfectly
> Than do another's well.
> Better die in your own duty.
> Another's task brings peril.

Rama, in the previous story, accepted and followed his *dharma*. He was as content to be banished as he was to be crowned. His only concern was to obey his father.

But Rama represents the ideal. Some Indian young people are trying to break away from the restrictions imposed by the ideals of *dharma* or traditional courtyard life. The following conversation among some young Indians and an English sociologist reflects the ideas of many urban students. What would bother such young people most about Babu's upbringing? What aspects of the traditional *dharma* of a son or daughter do they seem to resist?

◆

USHA'S PARTY WAS quite special. Except for myself and her father, everybody was young. At my instigation the young had taken a look at themselves in . . . anticipation of [an] American teach-in. The result had been most instructive. They felt that the young Indians were angry, not because it is fashionable to be angry ("John Osborne and all that!"), but because things had improved.

In the past, the young had no place in society, they had no entity; they were merely an extension of their parents, and from the time of their birth to that of their death every decision had been made for them. The decisions were made by their parents, by the caste council, by the astrologers. As one young architect put it, "We could not even decide what to eat. We had to eat spinach on a particular festival; not at any other time would spinach be cooked, for the taste, or the vitamins. And the same was of course true of marriage, and of jobs!"

Nisha, a beautiful teacher of English who had broken with tradition by marrying outside her religion, chipped in: "We are angry because for the first time . . . we have become individuals instead of being links in a chain. For the first time we are *we*, we are no longer *they*." Rohit, a manager in an advertising agency, added: "We cannot afford to compromise, to compromise would mean to get lost, to be swallowed back by tradition."

The Student Stage of Life

Editors' Introduction: The informal education of the young through imitation, example, and story eventually gives way to more formal education. Traditionally, this was known as the first stage of life, the student stage. Precise rules were set down to govern the student's behavior, specifying, among other things, chastity and total devotion to his *guru*.

Ravi Shankar, the world-famous sitar player, learned his music from a *guru* named Baba. Baba believed that students should follow the traditional *dharma* and, according to Ravi Shankar, provided an excellent example.

> His own life has been one of rigorous self-imposed discipline, and he expects no less from his students. Baba's views on celibacy and especially on intoxication through alcohol or drugs are extremely rigid and severe. He strongly insists that the students follow *brahmacharya* [chastity]—for the disciple, a traditional Hindu way of life that includes only the absolute essentials of material needs. This way, with no thoughts of fine clothes, fancy foods, sex, complicated love affairs, or anything else that satisfies and encourages physical desires, the student can channel all of his powers and forces, both mental and physical, into the discipline of his music.

In the following selection from his autobiography, Ravi Shankar describes the relationship between the student (*shishya*) and his

Ravi Shankar, *My Music, My Life* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1968). Copyright © 1968 by Kinnara School of Indian Music, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Simon and Schuster.

guru. How does this compare with your relationships with your teachers?

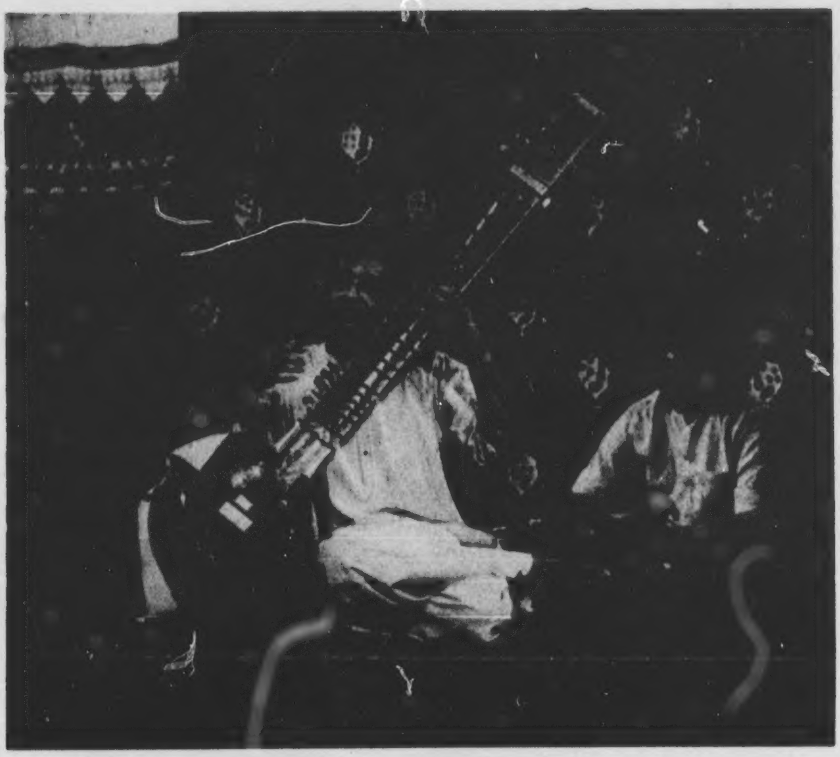
Guru, vinaya, sadhana—these three words form the heart of the musical tradition of India.

Guru, as many people now know, means master, spiritual teacher, or preceptor. We give a very important place to the *guru,* for we consider him to be the representation of the divine. . . . The choice of the *guru,* to us, is even more important than choosing a husband or a wife. A potential disciple cannot make a hasty decision to take just any teacher as his *guru,* nor should he break the bond between *guru* and *shishya,* once the *ganda* or *nara* ceremony, the initiation, which symbolically binds the two together for life, has taken place.

Vinaya means humility; it is the complete surrendering of the self on the part of the *shishya* to the *guru.* The ideal disciple feels love, adoration, reverence, and even fear toward his *guru,* and he accepts equally praise or scoldings. Talent, sincerity, and the willingness to practice faithfully are essential qualities of the serious student. The *guru,* as the giver in this relationship, seems to be all-powerful. Often, he may be unreasonable, harsh, or haughty, though the ideal *guru* is none of these. Ideally, he should respond to the efforts of the disciple and love him almost as his own child.

In India, a Hindu child from his earliest years is taught to feel humble toward anyone older than he or superior in any way. From the simplest gesture of the *namaskar,* or greeting (putting the hands palm to palm in front of the forehead and bowing), or the *pranam* (a respectful greeting consisting of touching the greeted person's feet, then one's own eyes and forehead, with the hands held palm to palm) to the practice of *vinaya,* or humility tempered with a feeling of love and worship, the Hindu devotee's vanity and pretension are worn away.

Sadly, this feeling of *vinaya* is lacking today in many young people, in the East and West alike. The Western student especially seems to have an excessively casual attitude



Ravi Shankar playing his sitar. (Information Service of India, New York, N.Y.)

toward his teachers and toward the process of learning. The teacher-student association is no longer patterned after the old father-son relationship; . . . the two are encouraged by prevailing attitudes to act as friends and to consider each other on an equal level. This system, of course, has its benefits, but it is far from ideal for studying Indian music and understanding our traditions. The Indian teacher finds this casualness disturbing even in so small a thing as the position the student takes when he sits. Often the Western student will try to sit on the floor like an Indian, but since he is not accustomed to this (poor thing!), sooner or later he stretches out his legs and shows the soles of his feet to the *guru*. To us Indians, the feet are . . . the most ignoble part of the body, and this position is one of extreme irreverence.

Among our legends, there is a story that illustrates very well this quality of *vinaya*. Long ago, it is said, the great *rishi* (saint-sage) Narada was convinced that he had gained complete mastery of the art of music, both in theory and performance. The wise Vishnu [God] decided to teach Narada a lesson and shatter his pride, so he brought him to the dwelling place of the gods. . . . As they entered one building, they saw many men and women with broken limbs, . . . weeping over their condition. Vishnu . . . asked [them] what was the matter, and they told him they were the spirits of *ragas* and *raginis* [songs] created by Shiva. They said a certain *rishi* named Narada, who could neither perform nor understand music properly, had twisted and broken their limbs through his singing. And they said that, unless some great and skilled musician could sing them again correctly, they would never regain their unmarred wholeness. When he heard this, Narada was deeply ashamed and, in all humility, knelt before Vishnu and begged forgiveness.

The third principal term associated with our music is *sadhana*, which means practice and discipline, eventually leading to self-realization. It means practicing with a fanatic zeal and ardent dedication to the *guru* and the music. If the student is talented, sincere, faithful to his *guru*, and devoted in his practicing, and if the *guru* is teaching with utmost dedication and not being miserly with his knowledge, there is a distinct pattern for learning Indian music. The student must begin by acquiring the most basic techniques of the voice or instrument. . . .

This elementary training, for a talented and persevering student, should last not less than five years, very much like the elementary training for any Western musical discipline. . . . The student should practice every day for at least eight hours.

In Western music, of course, the student has a visual advantage. That is, much of his learning can be taken from books, without the close supervision of a teacher. But with Indian music, for the first five or six years the student relies completely on the guidance of his *guru*. This is because the *guru* teaches everything to the *shishya* individually and directly, according to our ancient oral traditions, for very rarely do we use textbooks or manuals. Then, little by little, the student learns to improvise, and he works at it until he feels free and confident within a *raga*. . . .

Even after the student has become a fairly proficient performer and has created his own musical personality, he goes back to his *guru* from time to time for an evaluation of his development and to be inspired by new ideas. A true *guru* never stops growing musically and spiritually himself and can be a constant source of inspiration and guidance to the loving disciple.

So, starting from the very beginning, I would estimate that it requires at least twenty years of constant work and practice to reach maturity and a high standard of achievement in our classical music.

The Student and His Almost *Guru*

◆§*Editors' Introduction:* In the last selection, Ravi Shankar described the ideal relationship between the student and his *guru*. But not all student-teacher relationships in India are *shishya-guru* relationships. Education in the schools and colleges of India is carried on very much as it is in the United States. Indeed, the *guru* is not really a classroom teacher at all but is more like a tutor who teaches one student at a time, usually a specialized skill, such as music or dance. Even in this one-to-one relationship, the *guru* and his student do not always achieve the ideal set before them by tradition.

The following reading provides another example of a music *guru* and his student. The student this time is Ved Mehta, who has since become a famous journalist. This selection is from his autobiography.

Because Ved Mehta was blind, his parents thought that music would be a good vocation for him, and they hired a skilled musician to teach him. How does this teacher measure up to Ravi Shankar's description of the *guru*?§◆

. . . Pandit Hukam Chand, called Panditji, belonged, like many Indian musicians, to the old school of Indian music, and

From *Face to Face* by Ved Mehta, copyright © 1957 by Ved Mehta. By permission of Little, Brown and Co. in association with the Atlantic Monthly Press.

had gained his training. not by attending a conservatory, but by living with his teacher and attending to all his demands. In accordance with tradition, he became a disciple of his master, extracting concealed knowledge by massaging his feet, cooking his food, washing his clothes, and submitting to his will.

The *guru* imparted to his disciple his understanding of particular *ragas*, scale patterns for tunes, and music which he, the *guru*, had received from his *guru*, who in turn had received it from his. It was like the prescriptions of the *hakims* [village doctors], never written but entrusted to the safety of memory alone and passed by word of mouth to the most devoted pupil through a long, impressive line of generations.

Panditji, regretting the changing society which was undermining his prerogatives, was forced to impart for a fee these secrets which were his legacy, acquired under unbearable conditions and through hardships which only he could relate. However much he might value the money, he could not quite reconcile himself to sharing the secrets of Indian music.

It was not surprising, then, that Panditji, in his bitterness, had also become an unscrupulous man. He came to teach me, not because he respected or had an affinity for me as a *guru* might for his disciple, but as a chore forced upon him which had to be performed, however detestable. . . . He imparted his knowledge more as favors than as lessons. . . .

Panditji was not a conscientious man by any means and, unaware that even while I was singing my ears still kept track of his movements, he would get up, go to the mantelpiece, and set the clock ten minutes ahead so that he might shorten the time of his ordeal. Yet no one could summon enough courage ever to challenge, without proof, the integrity of the sage. For Panditji was a very learned man, and whatever faults he had . . . were dictated by "necessity."

But one day, as chance would have it, just as he was tampering with the clock, my father walked in. Father was at first embarrassed at having caught Panditji red-handed. Then, unable to control his irritation, he asked, "Panditji, what is it that makes you so uninterested in this pupil and moves you to set the clock ahead even though you admit he's a promising student? Were you prevaricating when you commented on my son's talent?"

Panditji retorted, "I was not . . . that time. But Doctorji, why would Almighty Providence have given lies to mankind if not to use? What chaos there would be if all men followed only the straight path of truth! Do you not admit it is so?" . .

Exasperated by this devious philosophical discourse, my father said only, "Panditji, I hope under this roof the climate may be more conducive to truth than to lies." Then he left the room, assuring Panditji, who was anything but insulted, that he had won his case and that the long years of training under his *guru* had not been wasted.

But there was one thing Panditji did not teach, and I never dared ask him to teach it to me. Only once a year could he be prevailed upon for his unique rendition of *ghunghrus* [small ankle bells], the most treasured art which he had acquired from his *guru*.

In India, the dancers tie a tight band of small bells around their ankles, and as they dance, these bells ring out in rhythmical tunes, disclosing the precise movements of their feet. Panditji had learned from his *guru* to imitate the sound of these bells in his throat, and he did this with such precision and authenticity that one might have suspected him of hiding *ghunghrus* somewhere in his chest. Once a year around Diwali, a great Hindu festival which celebrates the return of Rama from exile, by gradually preparing Panditji for three weeks, catering to his every wish in food, sweetmeats, or services, we could persuade him to give a rendition. . . .

A day before the Diwali, Panditji would stroll into the drawing-room and, instead of finding me there alone, would discover the whole family.

"No lesson today, Vedji?" he would ask me. I would look somewhat puzzled, and then he would say, "Well, it's holiday time—I'll come back after Diwali," and start to leave. Then

A dance pose. (Information Service of India, New York, N.Y.)

Mother would ask, "Panditji, won't you stay for a glass of *lussi* [a buttermilk drink]?"

"No—no—no," he would say, and my mother, in the typical manner of an Indian hostess, would refuse to take no for an answer and would persist. While my mother and Panditji were still debating, I would run into the pantry and fetch a glass of *lussi*. "Now you have to stay," I would say; and he would finally answer, "If you insist."

Even though he took his seat on the floor by the harmonium, still there was no guarantee that the performance would be on. No one dared suggest it, for if once he said no, you could depend on his obstinacy never to relent. It was not like drinking a glass of buttermilk, which by custom Panditji could never accept at the first offering. His performance had to come from within, from an inner inspiration; no external forces would be permitted to interfere with it. . . .

Finally, he would break into the bell-like notes. Slowly but surely the sound would grow more and more like the low jingling of the real bells. Then the tune on the harmonium and the resonant chiming would be coordinated until they blended into one sensuous melody. . . .

For one precious hour, without stopping to take one long breath, he went on, never playing the same tune twice, as if he had an unlimited repertoire. His perfect rhythm and excellently timed cadence made the melody and the chimes rich and beautiful. We sat spellbound and in ecstasy. At that moment, but only at that moment, I would gladly have become his disciple.

When he stopped, he was perspiring and gasping for air. He did not need any applause and compliments to assure him of his effect. He knew the full state of our rapture. After sitting immobile for fifteen minutes, until he had recaptured full control of his breath, he would quietly depart without any more ado. . . .

Had it been my fortune to have him longer than I did, I might have extracted more of that concealed knowledge which had ripened during its long contract with generations of sages and perhaps even learned the art of imitating *ghunghrus,* so that this treasure would not have perished with his death. I might even have become a musician, entrenched in his school and versed in his techniques, for even he admitted I was a promising student; but this could be achieved by no less means than by becoming the most devoted of all his disciples, abandoning home and academic education to follow his solitary passion. Instead, my thoughts and aims were pledged elsewhere, in a different direction, and I cannot say I am sorry for it.

Arranging a Marriage

Editors' Introduction: Childhood and the student stage of life end when the young man or woman is married. We say "is married" because most marriages in India are arranged. Just as childhood in India is usually set in the context of the joint family, marriage is a family affair as well, for the new couple has the responsibility of carrying on the family line. As we have noted, the young wife traditionally joins her husband's household. It is against this background that you must consider the arranged marriage.

An Indian once observed, "American young people go to college. There they choose from among the twenty or so possibilities they have met." Whether or not that observation is precisely correct, it is true that Americans generally choose a mate for themselves from among the relatively few people they happen to know.

The Indian system of arranged marriages offers a much wider range of choice. Some families even advertise for a partner for their son or daughter. A typical ad might read like one of these:

> Pretty girl for graduate, 36, getting Rupees 400/. No dowry. Caste no bar.
>
> Match: Educated virgin or widow for widower Brahmin, leading advocate, 40. No bars.

A more common, and usually more successful, practice is to ask family and friends to suggest a partner or to check on the suitability of a candidate. Even Americans are sometimes asked to help. The editors of this book, for example, received a letter from a

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friend in Delhi asking them to look up a young male student at one of the metropolitan New York colleges. The letter read in part: "This young man is shortly coming to India to get married and is still not engaged. If you find him alright, we shall, on hearing from you, send a proposal to his parents in Kanpur, in request of our daughter."

For some, marriage takes place in the natural flow of life. Since childhood, a girl has heard her mother correct her behavior and then add, "What will they say?"—the "they" referring to the family of her husband-to-be. Boys and girls in villages in the Punjab play together in groups, but as soon as an individual boy and girl show the slightest signs of interest in each other, the villagers say, "Youth has come to your girl; it is time to have her asked." Engagement, known as "being asked," is arranged by the families, and the wedding follows within a year. Once engaged, the girl is considered a member of her future husband's family. It is they who will now avenge any insult directed at the bride-to-be.*

For the young urban Indian, who has been exposed to new ideas, such as love matches, the process of finding a mate is sometimes rather different. The following selection tells how an upper-class, well-educated family arranges the marriage of their eldest daughter, Pom. How does Pom react to the marriage arrangements? How would you react to such plans?

IN THE MONTH of February, when we had been in Lahore almost four months, we heard through one of my father's friends about an eligible young dentist in Dehra Dun named Kakaji Mehrotra. As always in such cases, a thorough investigation followed, in which the young man and his family background were scrutinized. Even his friends were reviewed. Did they drink? With the precision of a lawyer, the liabilities and assets were carefully evaluated.

Even though her whole future happiness was at stake, sister Pom, who, as the eldest daughter, by tradition must be the first to marry, was given no hint of what was going on. For this there were several reasons: first, because when a girl reaches the age of marriage, many inquiries are made, and almost all the network of relations keeps on the lookout. Since the families are so large and remain in such close contact, there may be hundreds of people who, without being told, bear the eligible members of other families in mind. So there are many leads, all of which have to be carefully tracked down, and it is thought best not to worry the children with these steps. Then, too, since the parents ultimately make the decision, they deem it unnecessary to consult the child prior to . . . final arrangements.

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* Prakash Tandon, *Punjabi Century 1857–1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 52–55.

As Kakaji was a more attractive prospect than any other leads, his parents were finally approached—for the initiative always rests with the girl's parents. Then his family follows the same intricate process of thorough investigation, often with the help of relatives on the spot. If they are favorably impressed, then the parents, sometimes with their son, come to view the girl in question. But because Dehra Dun was so far from Lahore, Kakaji came by himself.

He arrived in Lahore in the early part of March and casually dropped in for tea. I say "casually" because his manner was that; but with the . . . elaborate planning behind the event it was actually anything but casual. Sister Pom—she was now nineteen—was sent for and came with mother into the drawing room. Dressed in a soft, silver-bordered sari, she shyly served Kakaji tea while he continued to talk to other members of the family. During the tea, he addressed some remarks to sister Pom about her studies in college and the painting over the mantelpiece, and told her about his summer practice at a hill station.

(After this short interview, on which so much depends, if Kakaji is attracted to sister Pom and favorably impresses our family, the talk proceeds, but without sister Pom's presence. Kakaji judiciously keeps from committing himself until he has spoken to his parents. If he doesn't like her, the matter is dropped.)

Actually, four days later a note arrived from his mother asking if sister Pom could be betrothed to Kakaji. My father, with his Western attitudes, refrained from answering the letter until sister Pom was consulted. So, in the drawing room one night, Mother approached sister Pom as to what she thought of Kakaji. Before Pom said anything, sister Umi, amused by all

A north Indian bridegroom ready to ride to the wedding ceremony. (Wide World Photos) the arrangements, remarked, "How do you expect her to know what her mind is when all they talked about was the furniture? Could she have fallen in love already?"

"Love, Urmil," my father answered, "means something very different from 'falling in love.' It is a process rather than an act, and only time can shape it. The best we can do is give it every opportunity to succeed, and I'll admit this is hard."

"But doesn't 'every opportunity' include knowing the person better?" sister Umi asked.

"Yes, it should," Father replied; "but here the question is one of choosing. To know a person thoroughly might take years. We believe that knowing can come only through living together."

"Do you mean, then," said Umi, "that knowing and love are the same thing?"

"Not quite, but understanding and respect are essential to mature love, and this deep understanding cannot come from friendship alone. Even serious conversations can't fully reveal a person's character. That can come only through experience, through sharing each other's problems. No amount of talking will bring about full understanding. It is only when you consider each other's problems as one and the same that you can hope for true understanding."

"But, Father," said Nimi, . . . the political rebel in the family, "look at the risk that's involved."

"We minimize the risk as far as possible," he explained. "We try to find a home that is most like ours. Take Kakaji. He's a dentist. His life will not be too different from mine. Now, if I were to marry Promila in the Brahmin [priestly] caste, I would be increasing the gamble. They might not eat meat; they would pray two or three times a day; and their professions would be on totally different lines. These things are small, perhaps, but they have far-reaching effects."

Nimi spoke again. "Then you are perpetuating a caste, because this presupposes that Pom would have to be married in the *Kshatriya* [warrior] caste of professional people. For myself, I'd willingly marry a *bania* [merchant] shopkeeper or even a *Shudra* [worker] untouchable and help break down these barriers."

"That day might come. But you will admit, Nirmil, that you are increasing the gamble."

"But for a cause I believe in," said Nimi.

"Yes," he answered, "but that's another matter."

"You say," Umi broke in, "that understanding and respect are necessary for a happy marriage. I don't see why you would respect a person more because you lived with him and shared his problems."

"In our society," said Father, "we think of respect as coming only through sacrifice."

"Then," said Umi, "you're advocating the subservience of women. Because it's not Kakaji who will sacrifice but sister Pom. And why should that be? And how is it that sister Pom will respect Kakaji because she sacrificed for him?"

"No, Urmil, it is the other way around. It is he who will respect her for her sacrifice."

"Does that mean that sister Pom will respect Kakaji, though?"

"Not necessarily. But if Kakaji is moved by Promila's sacrifice, he will show more consideration and growing concern for her. I know in my own case I was moved to the depths to see your mother, Shanti, suffer so. It took me long enough—too long, I believe—to reach that understanding, perhaps because I had broken away from the old traditions and had given in to the Western influence. You can hope, then, for this respect to be reciprocal between Promila and Kakaji; and don't forget that all this time they are getting to understand each other better."

Umi persisted. "This may take years! Is sister Pom to be unhappy all this time?"

"Perhaps so. But she is striving for ultimate happiness and love. These are precious gifts which can only be cultivated in time."

"Hard only for Pom," sister Umi insisted. "Aren't you struck by the injustice of this? Shouldn't Kakaji sacrifice for their happiness, too?"

"There has to be a start. Remember, it's her life that's joined with his. She will forsake her past to build a new future, and you may call this a complete beginning of absolutely new experience. If both Promila and Kakaji were to be obstinate and wait to see who will take the first step, what hope do you have of their ever getting together?"

"That's evading my question, Father. Why shouldn't he take the initiative?"

"He would, perhaps, be expected to do so if Promila were working too and leading another life which would be equal to his. I suppose more than this I really can't say, and there may be some injustice at that."

"What is this happiness you speak of?" said sister Umi. "I only vaguely understand it."

"It is a uniting of ideals and purposes, making them blend into one. Love grows gradually. This is the tradition of our society, and these are the means we have adopted to make our marriages successful and beautiful. We must have faith in the goodness of the individuals and rely on the strength of this sacred bond. In the West they have solved the problem in a different way, because their conditions differ from ours. I cannot say if it has worked any better."

"But I love my independence," said sister Umi, "for that is my ideal."

"Remember always," said Father, "that the ideals must be resolved by placing values on every one of them, for you must choose among them."

Then to sister Pom he said, "I have done my best, and my responsibility for you is not over. I will always be there to help and will continue to find satisfaction in your happiness. I have lived and worked for these values."

"And I respect your values and your judgment," replied sister Pom. "I have faith in your choice. Even if I do suffer, I can hope that some day our marriage will be as happy as yours."

Viewing a Prospective Bride

Editors' Introduction: In the previous selection, we considered marriage from the point of view of the girl and her family. In this reading, from a novel by R. K. Narayan, Chandran, a young newspaperman, is told that his mother has started the process of arranging Chandran's marriage. How do the qualities Chandran apparently seeks in a bride compare with the qualities you look for in a prospective marriage partner? What role do you expect your mother to play in your selection of a mate? How does it compare to Chandran's mother's role?

[One evening, as Chandran was working in his office, his father paid him a visit. They made polite conversation for a while.]

And then the conversation lagged for some time. Father suddenly said: "I have come on a mission. I was sent by your mother."

"Mother?"

"Yes. She wants this thing to be made known to you. She is rather nervous to talk to you about it herself. So she has sent me."

"What is it, Father?"

"But I wish you to understand clearly that I have not done

R. K. Narayan, *The Bachelor of Arts*, published in *Swami and Friends and The Bachelor of Arts*, Michigan State University Press, 1954. Reprinted by permission of William Morris Agency, Inc. Copyright 1954 by R. K. Narayan and Michigan State University Press.

anything behind your back. I have had no hand in this. It is entirely your mother's work."

"What is it, Father?"

"You see, Mr. Jayarama Iyer, who is a leading lawyer in Talapur, sent his daughter's horoscope to us some time ago; and for courtesy's sake yours was sent to them in return. Yesterday they have written to say that the horoscopes match very well and asking if we have any objection to this alliance. I was for dropping the whole matter there, but your mother is very eager to make it known to you and to leave it to your decision. . . ."

Chandran sat looking at the floor. His father paused for a moment and said: "I hear that the girl is about fifteen. They have sent a photo. She is good-looking. You can have a look at the photo if you like. They have written that she is very fair. They are prepared to give a cash dowry of 3,000 and other presents."

He waited for Chandran's answer. Chandran looked at him. There were drops of sweat on Father's brow, and his voice quivered slightly. Chandran felt a great pity for his father. What a strain this talk and the preparation for it must have been to him! Father sat silent for a moment and then said, rising: "I will be going now. I have to go to the club."

Chandran saw his father off at the door and watched his back as he swung his cane and walked down the road. Chandran suddenly realized that he hadn't said anything in reply and that his father might interpret silence for consent and live on false hopes. What a dreadful thing. He called his office boy, who was squatting on the steps of a neighboring shop, asked him to remain in the office, took out his cycle, and pedalled in the direction his father had taken. Father hadn't gone far. Chandran caught up with him.

"You want me?"

"Yes, Father."

Father slowed down and Chandran followed him, looking at the ground. "You have taken the trouble to come so far, Father, but I must tell you that I can't marry."

"It is all right, Chandar. Don't let that bother you."

Chandran followed him for a few yards and said: "Shall I go back to the office?"

"Yes."

As Chandran was about to mount his cycle, Father stopped him and said: "I saw in your office some papers and letters lying loose on your table. They are likely to be blown away by a wind. Remind me, I will give you some paperweights tomorrow.". . .

[In spite of what he thought about the marriage plans], early in the morning, five days later, Chandran, with his mother, was in a train going to Talapur. He was to look at the girl who had been proposed to him and then give his final word.

He said to his mother for the dozenth time: "If I don't like the girl, I hope they won't mind."

"Not at all. Before I married your father, some three or four persons came and looked at me and went away."

"Why did they not approve of you?" Chandran asked, looking at her.

"It is all a matter of fate," said Mother. "You can marry only the person whom you are destined to marry and at the appointed time. When the time comes, let her be the ugliest girl, she will look all right to the destined eye."

"None of that, Mother," Chandran protested. "I won't marry an ugly girl."

"Ugliness and beauty is all as it strikes one's eye. Everyone has his own vision. How do all the ugly girls in the world get married?"

Chandran became apprehensive. "Mother, are you suggesting that this girl is ugly?"

"Not at all, not at all. See her for yourself and decide. You have the photo."

"She is all right in the photo, but that may be only a trick of the camera."

"You will have to wait for only a few hours more. You can see her and then give your decision."

"But, Mother, to go all the way to their house and see the girl, and then to say we can't marry her. That won't be nice."

"What is there in it? It is the custom. When a girl is ready for marriage her horoscope will be sent in ten directions, and ten different persons will see her and approve or disapprove, or they might be disapproved by the girl herself; and after all, only one will marry her. A year before my marriage a certain doctor was eager for an alliance with our family; the horoscopes, too, matched; and his son came to look at me. But I didn't like his appearance, and told my father that I wouldn't marry him. It was after that that your father was proposed, and he liked my appearance, and when my father asked me if I would marry him I didn't say no. It is all settled already, the husband of every girl and wife of every man. It is nobody's choice."

They reached Talapur at 4 P.M. . . . They were welcomed into the house by Mr. Jayarama Iyer and his wife, both of whom subjected Chandran to a covert examination just as he tried to make out something of his future relatives-in-law. He found Mr. Jayarama Iyer to be a middle-aged person with a graying crop and a sensitive face. He was rather dark, but Chandran noted that the mother looked quite fair and hoped that the girl would have a judicious mixture of the father's sensitive appearance and the mother's complexion.

To his immense satisfaction, he found that it was so when, about an hour later, she appeared before him. She had to be coaxed and cajoled by her parents to come to the hall. With her eyes fixed on the ground, she stepped from an inner room, a few inches into the hall, trembling and uncertain, ready to vanish in a moment.

Chandran's first impulse was to look away from the girl.

He spent a few seconds looking at a picture on the wall, but then remembered that he simply could not afford to look at anything else now. With a sudden decision, he turned his head and stared at her. She was dressed in a blue sari. A few diamonds glittered in her earlobes and neck. His heart gave a wild beat and, as he thought, stopped. "Her figure is wonderful," some corner of his mind murmured. "Her face must also be wonderful, but I can't see it very well, she is looking at the ground." Could he shriek out to Mr. Jayarama Iyer, sitting in the chair on his right and uttering inanities at this holy moment: "Please ask your daughter to look up, sir. I can't see her face"?

Mr. Jayarama Iyer said to his daughter: "You mustn't be so shy, my girl. Come here, come here."

The girl was still hesitating and very nervous. Chandran felt a great sympathy for her. He pleaded: "Sir, please don't trouble her. Let her stay there."

"As you please," said Jayarama Iyer.

At this moment the girl raised her head slightly and stole a glance at Chandran. He saw her face now. It was divine; there was no doubt about it.

Jayarama Iyer said to his daughter: "Will you play a little song on the *veena*?" Chandran saw that she was still nervous and once again rushed to her succour. "Please don't trouble her, sir. I don't mind. She seems to be nervous."

"She is not nervous," said her father. "She plays very well and also sings."

"I am happy to hear that, sir, but it must be very difficult for her to sing now. I hope to hear her music some other day."

Jayarama Iyer looked at him with amusement and said: "All right."

It was with a very heavy heart that Chandran allowed himself to be carried away in the car from the bungalow. He could have cried when he said goodbye to his future brother-in-law and the train moved out of Talapur station.

A Brahmin priest conducts a Hindu wedding ceremony around the sacred fire. (Government of India Tourist Office, New York, N.Y.)

His mother asked him in the train: "Do you like the girl?"

"Yes, Mother," said Chandran with fervor. "Did you tell them that?"

"We can't tell them anything till they come and ask us."

Chandran made a gesture of despair and said: "Oh, these formalities. I loathe them. All this means unnecessary delay. Why shouldn't we send them a wire tomorrow?"

"Be patient. Be patient. All in its time, Chandra."

"But supposing they don't ask us?"

"They will. In two or three days they will come to us or write."

"I ought to have told Mr. Jayarama Iyer that I liked his girl," Chandran said regretfully.

Mother asked apprehensively: "I hope you have not done any such thing?"

"No, Mother."

"Patience, Chandra. You must allow things to be done in proper order."

Chandran leaned back, resigned himself to his fate, and sat looking out of the window. . . .

Selling the Bride

§*Editors' Introduction:* After exchanging horoscopes and viewing the bride, the families must agree on a dowry. The dowry is the money and/or goods given by the bride's family to the groom's family and the new bride.

There is considerable criticism of the dowry system in India today. If a man has several daughters, providing a dowry for each of them can be a great expense. Many families go into debt to provide the proper dowry.

The custom of giving dowries goes back in Indian tradition more than 3,000 years. A tradition of such long standing cannot be changed easily. And certain features of the system make sense—perhaps too much sense to be changed.

In the following selection, Ved Mehta discusses the dowry his family arranged for his sister Pom. What are some of the things American parents provide for their daughters that serve similar functions as the Indian dowry?§

ORIGINALLY, IN VEDIC times [3,000 years ago], the bride was adorned simply and affectionately and the dowry consisted of no more than a few presents from the family at the wedding. I soon learned how different it was now. Sister Pom's dowry must include clothes, jewelry, bedding, a sewing machine, cooking utensils, and cutlery—in fact, everything for a home save a car and the house itself, which might have been included had

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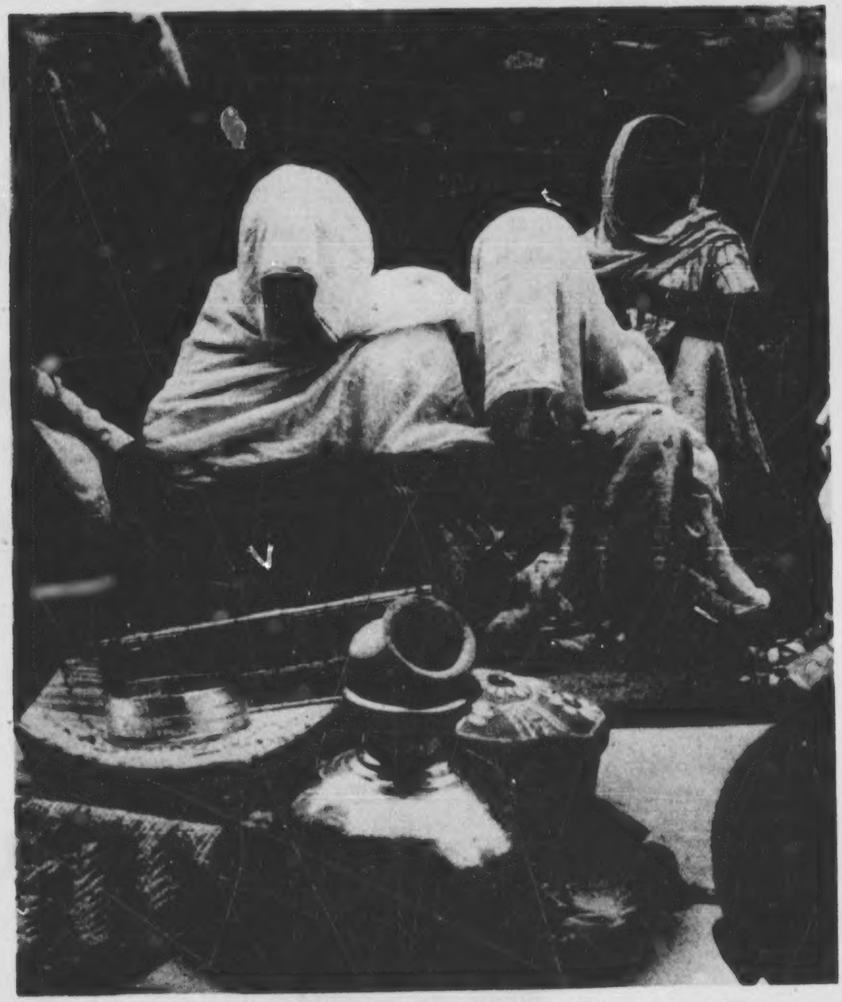
it not been for the three younger sisters, whose dowry had to match sister Pom's. The splendor of this dowry might well determine the subsequent offers to my other three sisters, and my



A shy bride arrives in her new home with part of her dowry. (Mrs. Charlotte Wiser) grandmother carefully canvassed many of our relatives as to the presents they would give to the bride, so that there might be no duplication.

Although a few of the relatives thought the number of twenty-two saris was rather few, most consented. Long days were spent by Mother and sister Pom going to crowded bazaars and choosing the saris, which had to differ in materials, colors, and borders. No two could be alike, and even though the expensive ones of Benares brocade cost hundreds of rupees, the wardrobe was supposed to be so rich in variety that the bride could have a sari for each and every occasion for many years to come. (Actually, saris are very practical garments. Always six yards in length, they fit every size of woman, be she short or tall, slender or stout, merely with a few subtle adjustments of the folds.)

Jewelry matching the saris had to be made to order. Because until recently the laws of inheritance in India favored the male members of the family at the expense of the widow, a woman's most valued possessions were her gold and diamonds. These jewels alone formed her *istri-dhan*, her inheritance, which could not be taken away from her after her husband's death, according to Manu, the great Hindu lawgiver. My mother had recited to me the law of Manu sometimes before: "The ornaments which may have been worn by a woman during her husband's lifetime his heirs shall not divide. Those who divide them shall be outcasts."

◆ *Editors' Postscript:* The saris and other expensive items that made up Pom's dowry might seem ostentatious—a way of showing off the wealth of the bride's family—but the dowry serves a number of practical purposes as well. As Ved Mehta mentioned, the dowry is the bride's inheritance. The sons will receive land and other property at their father's death. The daughters instead receive a dowry at marriage: the saris, jewelry, and cooking utensils they take to their husband's house.

The dowry can also help to sustain a family in times of need. There are many Indian stories and poems in which a wife proves her love for her husband by selling her jewelry and giving him the money. The dowry, especially jewelry, thus becomes a form of insurance for an Indian family.

Finally, a young couple beginning life together needs resources for setting up a household. In America some of these needs are met through wedding or engagement presents or family generosity. In India the dowry serves the same purpose.

Procreation or Recreation?

Editors' Introduction: Once married, the young man and woman enter a new stage of life, with new demands. The change is especially dramatic for the young bride, who joins her husband's family psychologically as well as physically. What is expected of her?

To appreciate the position of the young woman as she starts her married life, it is important to understand the Hindu ideals of women. The following selection, by an Indian journalist, analyzes the concept of woman-power in India. Does sacrifice mean inferiority? Is it possible for men and women to have different roles but equal status? Think back over the role of Santha Rama Rau's grandmother (pp. 22–25), Chandran's mother (pp. 57–63), and the comments by Pom's father (pp. 51–56); are there other kinds of power besides political and economic?

IN THE BEGINNING, according to Indian mythology, was *Shakti*, and *Shakti*, which means energy, has a feminine gender in Sanskrit. The cosmos was her creation, her child. Now this image of the beginning of the world is not only appealing in an idealistic sense, but it also approaches the story patched together by the discoveries of science. And what could be nobler than to see the Creator as a Mother? It is the mother, not the father, who comes to mind first whenever the word "creation" is mentioned. . . .

The most meaningful word the Hindus have for woman is

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Shiva-Shakti, the male and female energies in the universe, pictured as a single being. (Archaeological Survey of India, Government of India) *mata,* or "mother." Philosophers and poets alike have believed "mother love" to be the ideal love, the real love, a love utterly unselfish and boundless. From conception to death, she intuitively and naturally believes in giving with no thought of return. . . . All other loves, the loves of the betrothed, of married couples, of friends, of fathers for their sons, of brothers and sisters, are based on reciprocity and are forms of friendship; mother love alone can be one-sided, lavishing care and affection upon the prodigal as well as upon the perfect child. . . .

It is motherhood more than womanhood, then, that the Hindus glorify. Manu the law-giver [who wrote between the 1st century B.C. and the 2nd century A.D.] took many occasions to say unlovely things about womanhood. Only once in his life, when he wrote that "the gods come down to play where women are worshiped," did he permit himself to pay women a compliment. But in his idolization of motherhood he is quite emphatic, and his code says: "A master exceedeth ten tutors in claim to honor; the father a hundred masters; but the mother a thousand fathers in right to reverence and in the function of teacher."

. . . the usual blessing offered the newlywed bride as she bows to her elders is: "Be the mother of a hundred sons!" Generally, the Hindu woman does not come into her own until she becomes a mother, preferably of a son. She then becomes the head of household affairs and is venerated.

Paying greater honor to motherhood than to womanhood implies an emphasis on creation rather than on recreation. Accordingly, marriage becomes more work than play. It becomes a sanctioned and sacramental union of man and woman whose purpose is to carry on the sacred task of perpetuating the race. . . . When motherhood is put before womanhood, romance dies a little. This does not mean that there are no flirtations or no elopements in India, for girls will be girls and boys will be boys the world over; but it does mean that romance cannot be the central theme of marriage. . . .

This Hindu preoccupation with motherhood in no way implies an inferior status for the Indian woman. . . . But the worship of motherhood in preference to womanhood had one great latent danger in it. It was capable of fostering the conception that woman was merely a means to an end rather than an end in herself. It is the materialization in Hindu society of this danger that has dismally marked Indian life ever since; . . . even Uma [consort of the great god Shiva] was quoted as saying to Shiva: "A woman should be beautiful and gentle, considering her husband as her God and serving him as such in fortune and misfortune, health and sickness, obedient even if commanded to unrighteous deeds or acts that may lead to her own destruction."

Motherhood means sacrifices and anonymity, a life of self-effacement and silent toil. No one will claim that the ideal of motherhood is not a noble ideal. But it is likely, in a society dominated by such a concept, that woman's needs and desires as a flesh-and-blood creature may be overlooked or even forgotten. That is exactly what has happened in India. . . . Although the Western preference of womanhood to motherhood can be equally harmful when carried too far, creating its own dire problems, it at least guarantees woman her own personality and her peculiar claims on the pleasures of life; it does not put her to scorn if she is barren or if she bears no sons.

Stories My Mother Told Me

⁂*Editors' Introduction:* One major area in which Indian women have had influence is the education of socializing of the young. We have already suggested, in "The Banishment of Rama" (pp. 33–36), how the stories grandmother tells teach children to accept their *dharma.* In the last reading you saw that the expectations for men and women may be quite different; the stories used to teach girls will therefore be different from the stories told to the boys. Just as Rama is held up as the ideal for young boys, Rama's wife, Sita, is offered as an example for girls. When Rama was banished to the forest, Sita insisted on going with him: "As it is your duty to obey your father's wish, so it is my duty, as your wife, to be at your side." Moreover, Sita insisted on her duty to serve Rama in all things: "I shall walk in front of you in the forest ways, and tread the thorns to make the ground smooth for your feet." During their forest exile, Sita was abducted and held captive by the demon-king of Lanka (Sri Lanka). After her rescue, she proved her purity and constancy throughout her captivity by submitting to an ordeal by fire. At no time did her absolute devotion to Rama waver. "Be as Sita," young wives are told.

In the following reading, an Indian girl describes to her brother how their mother used stories to educate her. The author, a well-known Bengali writer, recalls, "No two in our family were taught alike. It was an individualistic training, and these stories, some of them apparently so slight, were the means by which our mother

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Dhan Gopal Mukerji, *My Brother's Face* (New York: Dutton, 1924), pp. 128–32.

presented truth to our young minds." Why did she dismiss *Hamlet?* What models do Western mothers hold up to their daughters?

"TO ME, MOTHER gave different instructions from yours, my brothers. I was taught only stories and songs of devotion. I do not know whether she had a premonition that I should become a widow at twenty-two, but . . . she taught me as if she felt certain of it, her sweet understanding firmly paving the road, so that it would be firmer under my feet at the bleak hour of calamity. And I believe that was why she had me taught English."

I expressed surprise at this, for my mother herself knew not how to read or write. My sister explained that Mother had said to her:

"I belong to the age when wisdom came to men's hearts naturally, but thou, my child, art born in a time when only printed words are considered true. Learn English, my daughter; it is the ruler's language and since thou canst not rule men without some cunning, the English tomes may help thee to hold thy place in this world."

"It did serve me in good stead after my husband's death," went on my sister. "But, thank God, I have forgotten all of that language now."

"Why?" I asked.

"Oh, it has so little wisdom and not much beauty. The last story I read in English was about a dead man's ghost who tells his son how he, his father, was murdered; then the young prince, an innocent dreamer, kills an old fool, whose daughter's heart he breaks, and fights her brother at her funeral. Later, the prince is killed by the brother, whom he kills as well. It has luscious words in it, for an innocent young man's sorrow tastes sweet to the reader; but how can it be a tale of wisdom which our mother would have had me learn? Can ghosts be so revengeful? Is it right to tell a mother that she is unchaste, and all because of the idle talkativeness of a good-for-nothing Spirit who should go to Heaven instead of walking about at night to poison his son's life with cruel thirst for vengeance? That tale destroyed all my ambition to know English. Thou dost know the language well; was I not right to give it up?"

"Yes, that wanton tale of beauty should discourage anybody." Thus I disposed of Prince Hamlet.

My sister resumed: "I took to learning from Mother all the stories . . . she taught me line after line of the story of Savitri and how she saved her husband from death. Next I memorized the trial of Sita. When I grew to be a woman, I was made to fast twenty-four hours in seclusion with her, and in that seclusion she taught me Gita Govinda, the Song of Songs, and imparted the secret and wisdom of love to my heart." Suddenly, she stopped to ask me, "How do Western mothers teach their daughters the art and wisdom of love?"

"Am I a woman or a Westerner that thou shouldst ask me that?" I questioned.

"Men always insist on remaining ignorant," she retorted, and went on with her story. "I learned to cook, to serve dinner, how to dress for cooking, then how to dress for dinner after cooking. The garment of the kitchen may be worn only after an arduous bath and the cleansing of the body. Once the cooking is done, the garment of the kitchen must be put away and the garment of the feast donned. I was not allowed to rest in the afternoon in the dress of the feast. . . . Oh, there were a thousand little things that the woman-mind picks up as a miser gathers his pennies—there was the evening toilet, the meditation—all these things was I taught as well as the work of pleasing a husband."

Nurtured on Formula

☙*Editors' Introduction:* Today more and more Indian girls are receiving higher education and leaving the confines of the joint family. Professor P. Lal, a poet-philosopher, has some observations on the effects this trend may have on India. Note that he assumes the importance of woman's traditional role. What does he mean by de-mythification?❧

QUESTION: What would you choose from the Indian tradition to pass on to your children?

PROFESSOR LAL: Oh, in fact I wouldn't pick out anything. My wife would. That is the way the tradition is continued in the country. At night time, or at other times when the children come to her for any kind of discussion on what you might describe as a moral problem, she would come out with stories from the *Ramayana* or the *Mahabharata* or even other legends which might clarify their problem for them.

Q: In other words, these stories still live and the women hand down the tradition; they still tell their daughters: "Be a good wife—be as Sita"?

LAL: Very much so. Absolutely. That's the real way the tradition goes on. The husband, the man, as a rule doesn't play much of a role.

Interview conducted by Donald J. Johnson, 1971.

Q: So this is not something that really could be taught in school, as literature?

LAL: In fact, it would be disastrous, officially and academically, to teach it that way. I don't think traditions are communicated that way. At least, not in India.

Q: As you look around India today, it is obviously going through great ferment, one might almost call it a renaissance. What do you see as some of the most exciting trends in today's India?

LAL: Well, first of all, in Calcutta one sees large numbers of girls in school uniforms in the streets. I see this immediately, every day when I go out in the city. This is a real revolution. Every morning thousands of these girls are going to school. Now imagine what's going to happen in the country in ten years. I can see this coming, a complete change of education and of values connected with education.

Q: What do you think the basic changes in education will be over the next generation or two? That's certainly one—the girls being educated—but in the educational system itself?

LAL: I foresee, strangely enough, increasing secularization. If the kind of education that's been given continues, if there isn't a dramatic change, a necessary change, then India's going to become more and more like other secular countries, and the myth values are going to be slightly destroyed in the process. There might be a self-correction built in somewhere. I hope so, but the way things are, more and more Indians are going to be alienated in their own country, strangers in their own country.

Q: Well, the number of educated girls you're speaking of would seem to be, on the surface, a bit of a contradiction with the point you made earlier about the mother handing down the myths to the children. Once she has a M.A. in chemistry, will the woman of that sort . . .

LAL: That's precisely what I had in mind. That's what I mean

Village women prepare a meal. (Donald and Jean Johnson)

Indian housewives demonstrate to protest rising food prices. (United Press International, Inc.)

A village woman shapes cow dung and straw into cakes for use as fuel in cooking. (Mrs. Charlotte Wiser)

by secularization, de-mythification. The girl who has a chemistry degree will probably give out formula to her children. But one can't tell. Perhaps the villages here will be slower to accept rational, secular, completely Western techniques than the cities have been. But there is going to be a big change. And I hope this is done slowly. These girls are going to educate the whole country in another fifteen or twenty years' time.

Woman's Place, East and West

Editors' Introduction: The last few readings have focused on the Indian woman's role as mother and have advocated such "womanly" roles as self-sacrifice, pleasing a husband, and educating the young. Does this mean that the Indian woman is inferior and needs to be "liberated"?

When we remember the concept of *dharma*, inferiority and superiority are meaningless. Is the rain inferior to a lake because it gives itself to the lake? To an Indian, a woman's *dharma* is different from a man's; both are necessary to society.

This concept of "separate but equal" *dharmas* does not mean that all Indian women are content with their role, but it may help us in attempting to evaluate the Indian woman's position with regard to women's liberation. Rabindranath Tagore, the famous Bengali poet who won the Nobel Prize in 1913, provided some insights on this subject as far back as 1895. Are Tagore's comments the musings of a male chauvinist poet? How do they depart from the feminist position?

Who Is to Be Pitied?

JUDGING FROM OUTSIDE, I feel that in proportion as European civilization progresses, woman is being rendered increasingly unhappy. . . . Men are seeking shelter in distant nooks and

From a letter by Rabindranath Tagore. Reprinted from Basanta Koomar Roy, *Rabindranath Tagore: The Man and His Poetry* (New York: Dodd Mead, 1915), pp. 121–25.

corners of the earth, men who are bowed down by the crushing struggle for existence, which is partly due to artificially created wants. In Europe man is getting to be quite unwilling to burden himself with a family; consequently woman's family obligations are decreasing. The fair maid has to wait long for a groom, and the wife has to suffer from lovesickness while her husband is away earning a livelihood for the family. The grown-up son does not hesitate in the least to leave his mother's home. Even though her training, tradition, and nature are opposed to it, yet woman in the West has to go out and work and struggle for existence.

This discord in social harmony, I think, is the principal reason why woman in the West is fighting for equal rights with man. . . . There man is loath to build a home for woman and at the same time is stubborn in refusing her equal rights to enter the arena of fruitful work. . . .

Strength is the watchword of European society today. There is no place for the weak, male or female. That is why women are becoming ashamed of their femininity and are striving to prove their strength, both of body and of mind. . . .

It is impossible for a woman in an European family to attain to the varied perfections that a woman can reach in a Hindu home. It is for this reason that it is deemed a grave misfortune to be a spinster in England. Her heart becomes sour, and she finds consolation in nursing puppies or in doing "charity" or "social" work. As the milk from the breast of the mother of a stillborn babe has to be artificially pumped out to keep the mother in health, so the milk of tenderness from an European spinster's heart has to be artificially pumped out for charity organizations; but it fails to contribute to the innate satisfaction of her soul.

I am afraid that the present-day civilization of Europe is imperceptibly extending the arid zone in its social life. The superabundance of luxuries is smothering the soul of the home —home that is the very abode of love, tenderness, and beneficence—a thing that is, above all, most essential for the healthy development of the human heart. In Europe homes are disappearing and hotels are increasing in number. When we notice that men are happy with their horses, dogs, guns, pipes, and clubs for gambling, we feel quite safe in concluding that women's lives are being gradually broken up. Heretofore the male bees used to gather honey outside and store it in the hive, where the queen bee ruled supreme. Now the bee prefers to rent a cell and live by himself, so that he alone may drink all the honey in the evening that he gathers during the daytime. Consequently, the queen bee is obliged to come out in the world of competition to gather honey, so that she may live. She has not yet been able to get accustomed to the changed conditions of life and society. The result is uneasiness. . . .

Such, in short, is the present status of woman in the West. And when the English philanthropists shed crocodile tears over the "wretched condition of the women of India," I feel mortified at such a waste of sympathy, especially when it is such a rare thing with Englishmen.

Our women make our homes smile with sweetness, tenderness and love. . . . We are quite happy with our household goddesses, and they themselves have never told us of their "miserable condition." Why, then, should the meddlers from beyond the seas feel so bad about the imagined sorrows of our women? People make mistakes in imagining too much what would make others happy or unhappy. If, perchance, the fishes were to become philanthropists, their tender hearts would find satisfaction only in drowning the entire human race in the depths of water.

An Indian Looks at Women's Lib

◆§*Editors' Introduction:* Tagore wrote seventy-five years ago; the following selection was written in 1973. The author, an Indian woman who has observed the American scene first hand, uses both

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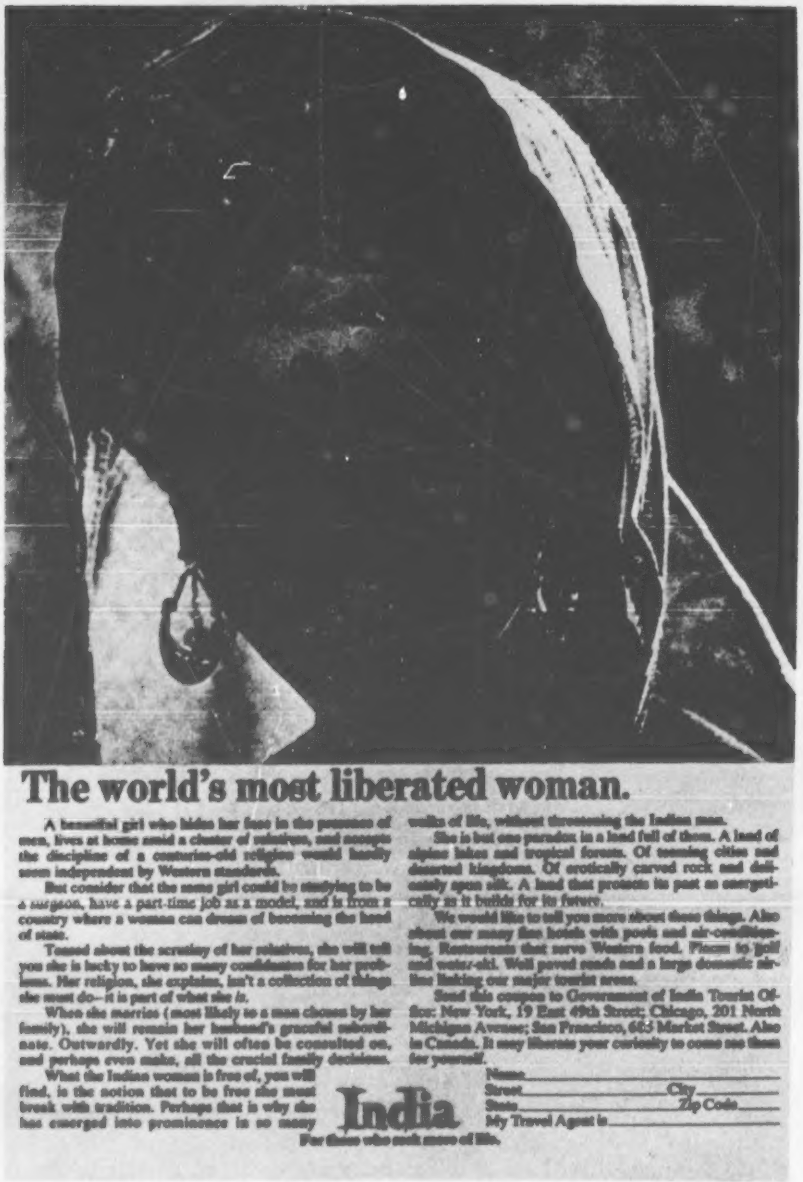
Tara Ali Baig, "An Indian Looks at Women's Lib," *Imprint*, July, 1973, pp. 7–8.

mythology and history to compare the position of women in Western society and India. Can you explain, on the basis of the argument, why a woman has been elected Prime Minister in India?❧

To THE WORLD beyond America . . . "Women's Lib" has become synonymous with the sensational. In United Nations debates, in seminars by learned professors the world over, in Rotary Clubs and after-dinner speeches, "Women's Lib" is invariably used . . . with a little smirk, and the audience smirks happily in response. . . . Introduced into a more serious statement, it is guaranteed to lighten the mood and cause an automatic ripple of approval, both smug and patronizing.

But this was not at all the original purpose of Women's Liberation. What has now been lost in this subtle battle of the sexes is the over-all necessity of this movement in the Aryan world. It is a specific and very real problem in the West, especially those countries with a Germano-Teutonic history. The phrase "women's place is in the home" did not originate in Asia, nor for that matter did the limitation of her sphere to "children, kitchen and church." This was strictly a product of a patriarchal society that kept women over the ages firmly out of all the *mysteries*, and hence out of power and authority. If women played a role in ancient Greece as goddesses or vestal virgins, or in India as seers or divine personages, nothing of the sort could take place in the world of the God Thor, let alone the Roman Caesars or the Pontificate of the Medieval Church.

We are all children of our separate histories. It is only in the Mother Goddess belt or that of the Earth Mother, such as the eastern Mediterranean and in parts of Asia, that maleness has not been glorified above femaleness. In these geographical regions there is really no such thing as the *dominant* male, but rather a reasonable biological acceptance of the difference which gives man and woman clear-cut earthly functions. Since these were comparable to nature around them, and an integral part of their daily lives, the seed was considered male and the



The world's most liberated woman.

A beautiful girl who hides her face in the presence of men, lives at home amid a cluster of relatives, and accepts the discipline of a centuries-old religion would hardly seem independent by Western standards.

But consider that the same girl could be studying to be a *surgeon*, have a part-time job as a model, and is from a country where a woman can dream of becoming the head of state.

Teased about the scrutiny of her relatives, she will tell you she is lucky to have so many confidantes for her problems. Her religion, she explains, isn't a collection of things she must do—it is part of what she *is*.

When she marries (most likely to a man chosen by her family), she will remain her husband's graceful subordinate. Outwardly. Yet she will often be consulted on, and perhaps even make, all the crucial family decisions.

What the Indian woman is free of, you will find, is the notion that to be free she must break with tradition. Perhaps that is why she has emerged into prominence in so many walks of life, without threatening the Indian man.

She is but one paradox in a land full of them. A land of alpine lakes and tropical forests. Of teeming cities and deserted kingdoms. Of erotically carved rock and delicately spun silk. A land that protects its past as energetically as it builds for its future.

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earth female. It was equally clear to the simplest intellect that the *earth* nurtured the seed. For the plant grown to final fruition, the earth was the actual ground of its being. This elementary concept has done more for women in the East than any other single factor. Man, is, in fact, dependent upon woman because she is the sole provider of his creature comforts.

In the Aryan, male-dominated society, however, things were not nearly so simple. Why this was so is hard to say. In rugged northern societies with long winters and greater emphasis upon the hunter rather than the cultivator, it is possible that women's place grew out of the fact that she did not share in the hunt but had to stay in her cave, hut, or igloo to protect her young. It is equally possible that man, in such societies, found a delicious liberation from the clamor of the home and women in these forays into the open unknown. He eventually began to protect his liberty and solitude with a calculated ferocity.

That he would continue to do this today may well stem from the fact that in the home, the American male . . . is not only dominated by his mother, but made to do all sorts of tasks, like dishwashing or cleaning up, that a boy does not consider masculine. Come to adulthood, he generally goes through a phase of wanting to have nothing to do with girls. Then he reaches the "wanting girls" phase. . . . By this time his need for women probably matches his need not to be encumbered by women, and the inevitable cycle starts of wooing and rejection, based upon a very real fear that any "weakness" or concession will eventually cost him his secret inner freedom. In matriarchal societies no such shunning of women ever arose. In fact, man needed woman as partner, provider of comfort, and source of strength, the legendary "*shakti.*"

While this is obviously an oversimplification, it may explain the curious rivalry between men and women in the Western world which now has serious economic implications.

Whereas in India a woman of outstanding talent can rise to eminence in almost any career, it is virtually impossible in the West for this to happen.

The Householder

◆ *Editors' Introduction:* With marriage, the man enters the second phase of life, known as the householder stage. In this period of life, woman's power is mostly within the family circle, while the man [illegible] responsible for activities in the outside world. The man controls the family's economic position, makes the decisions involving relations with neighbors, and earns the family living according to the rules of his community. He expects unquestioning service and devotion from his wife and absolute obedience from his children.

The ancient texts teach that the householder's *dharma* is to seek *artha* (material wealth and power) and *kama* (physical pleasure, especially in sex). For most Indians, however, the householder stage is a daily struggle for existence, a never-ending battle to pay the bills and stay out of trouble. Renouncing the world and seeking God are not even options for this stage of life. That comes later.

In the following reading, we are introduced to Prem, the hero of an Indian novel entitled *The Householder*. Which of Prem's problems and concerns are similar to those of recently married Americans? Which are different? ◆

PREM SAT AT the only table they had and corrected his students' essay papers. The table was a very frail and shaky one, made of thin cane, and it would have been more comfortable to sit on the floor. But he felt there was a certain dignity about

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Reprinted from *The Householder* by R. Prawer Jhabvala, pp. 7–11, 18–19, 35, 39–44. By permission of W. W. Norton & Company, Inc. Copyright © 1960 by R. Prawer Jhabvala.

sitting at a table; his father had always sat at a table when correcting papers. . . .

It was a Sunday evening, and correcting papers, he felt, was not a very good way of spending it. But he had as yet no friends in Delhi and knew of no places to go to. . . .

Indu yawned rather loudly, which irritated Prem. Why should she be tired? She had done no work. She was sitting on the floor, stitching a blouse for herself. Once or twice he had heard her sigh very quietly. That too had irritated him, for he did not see that she had any cause for unhappiness. Rather it was he who had cause for unhappiness, for the burden of providing for her and for himself, of paying for their rent and their food and their servant-boy, was all his. And now she was pregnant. He had already had to pay five rupees to a doctor for confirming that fact. Her pregnancy was a terrible embarrassment for

A low-income housing project near Bombay. (Information Service of India, New York, N.Y.)

him. Now everybody would know what he did with her at night in the dark, . . . quickly and guiltily. . . . And besides the embarrassment, there was the worry. Soon he would have a family and his expenses would mount, but his salary at Mr. Khanna's college was only 175 rupees a month. How to manage on that? His rent alone came to 45 rupees.

What he needed was a better-paid job. He had been thinking of it for some time now, ever since he had learned that Indu was pregnant, but this evening it occurred to him for the first time to glance through old newspapers and see what kinds of jobs were being advertised nowadays. . . . But . . . there were no jobs for him. Only for engineers and draughtsmen and doctors. Nobody seemed to want a teacher of Hindi. . . .

He realized that he would have to improve on what he had. He would have to ask the principal for a raise in salary. It was not something he liked to do, but that only increased his conviction that he must do it. . . .

[The next day, Prem found the courage to ask for a raise. He reports the results to a fellow teacher, Sohan Lal.]

"Things are difficult for me," Prem said. "My salary is small, you see, I am married and I pay a rent of 45 rupees and my wife is pregnant." He shot a quick side glance at Sohan Lal: this was the first time he had told anyone, face to face like this, about Indu being pregnant.

Sohan Lal was, as Prem had expected him to be, understanding. He said at once, "You wanted to ask about a raise in salary?"

"What can you do with 175 rupees a month when your rent alone is 45 rupees?"

"What did he say?"

"It is strange," Prem said. "He did not understand." . . .

In the evening, on their way home, he talked rather more freely. "You see," he said, "it is not very long ago that I was a student living in my parents' house." Sohan Lal nodded. "I had no worries there at all, except only that I should pass my examinations. . . . Everything was so different then!" cried Prem.

"Yes," said Sohan Lal, quite sadly, "when we are young and have no responsibilities life is very beautiful."

"Suddenly there are so many responsibilities," Prem said. "For instance, I never had to worry about money—of course, I never had much money, but my father gave me an allowance and that was enough for tea and biscuits and cinema sometimes . . ."

"When we are young, so many things cost nothing."

"That is true," Prem said. "We often went on picnics and that did not cost anything because our mothers gave us food to take and we had a very jolly time though we did not spend anything."

"In our youth the sky is blue and the trees are green and the birds sing. What worries can we have when things are like that?"

"Yes, yes," Prem cried and he stood still in his excitement, "it was exactly like that! I remember our picnics . . ."

[Later, Prem went to a movie to forget his troubles. After the movie, he sat alone on a park bench.]

Prem turned and saw a young man, a European, with a big head and rimless spectacles. "I was also admiring, like you," he said, nodding with a smile toward the sky. "I was thinking how much beauty is there in India, how much color is there, it is all so nice—but this is the country where people renounce the flesh and think only of the Spirit!" Prem stared at him. "It is marvellous," said the young man. "I may sit with you?" He flung himself down on the grass at Prem's feet though there was plenty of room on the bench. He said, "Only think—in this country where everything is beautiful, the sunset and the fruit and the women, here you call it all Illusion! How do you say—*Maya?*"

Prem said, "Yes, *Maya,*" though he was not quite sure. He could not take his eyes off this young man, who seemed to him very strange.

"What is this *Maya?* . . . Explain me, please." He folded his arms and looked at Prem very challengingly. Prem began to panic a little, for he was not sure how or what he was expected to explain. But the young man did not really wait for an answer. He unfolded his arms again and called in a loud, joyful voice, "How I love your India!" His pale eyes behind the rimless spectacles shone with happiness, he showed moist colorless gums in a blissful smile. "For me it is all one big feast!"

Prem felt called upon to make some comment. He was proud to hear a foreigner speak so highly of India, it raised all his patriotism. "Since Independence," he said, "we have made great strides forward. For instance, our second Five Year Plan——"

"Everything is so spiritual—we can wash off our dirty materialism when we come here to your India. Off with it!" and he started quite literally scrubbing at his arms and then at his neck with great vigor.

"There are our new steel plants," said Prem. "Six million tons of steel——"

"It is such an old country and yet fresh—oh, my God, fresh like a newborn child!" He wrung his hands in ecstasy and smiled. Then suddenly he introduced himself: "I am Hans Loewe." He held out a large hand, but before Prem could shake it, he withdrew it again and said, "No, like this," and joined his hands together in front of his face in Indian salute: "*Namaste,*" he said with a very strange accent. "Loewe means lion—I am Hans the Lion." He roared like one and then slapped his knee in laughter. Prem laughed with him, out of politeness.

The Tailor's *Dharma*

Editors' Introduction: The householder must follow an occupation. In the ancient Hindu system, occupation was determined by heredity. A carpenter's son was a carpenter. Each occupational group had specific duties to perform, duties that it alone could do. Crossing occupational lines was a violation of one's *dharma.* To do another's work was as inappropriate as if the moon were to burn instead of reflect. Each occupation was important for the functioning of the total society.

The tailor in the following selection has descended from a long line of tailors. He takes pride in his profession. How does he react to the views of the young man newly returned from the West? What gives the tailor his confidence?

The young man in the story is Ved Mehta. In earlier selections we read of his struggle to learn music from Panditji (pp. 44–49) and of the arrangement of his sister's marriage (pp. 50–56). This selection is taken from a travelogue he wrote about India.

THE TAILOR SITS on our veranda. He has been working for us for many years. In the days before we fled from Pakistan, he made my rompers and knee pants, and when I graduated to wearing long pants he put them on me and slapped my behind three or four times to remind me of my manhood. "But," he

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Ved Mehta, *Walking the Indian Streets* (Boston: Little, Brown & Co. 1959), pp. 123–29. Reprinted by kind permission of the author.

added quickly, "Ved Sahib, you will always be a boy to me." . . .

Unlike many other Indian tailors, our tailor is never on the lookout for new clients. All his customers seem to be of twenty years' standing. . . .

Our tailor, though modest in appearance, claims he can change a man by changing the style of his clothes. He can transform babu into sahib, sahib into officer. . . . Nothing is beyond him. His confidence is unnerving, and the only thing that makes him real is his endless family saga. . . .

The tailor is the last of our old servants; the two house servants are new. I feel a bond with him because he has watched me through my changing years.

I can hear the slap of my bare feet when as a child I raced with forbidden street children, the old servants watching and scolding and flattering, the tailor among them shouting, "Watch out for your clothes," and, in the same breath, "Don't stop, get on with you." They smiled whether I won or lost. This was loyalty. Sometimes my parents reproved me for being too close to the servants, but when they were out in offices and shops, parties and clubs, the servants remained home as companions and storytellers. The children next door moved away, their father transferred to another district. But the servants grew up with us. They never changed

The tailor sits on the veranda of our new house, turning the wheel of his machine. I recline on the small lawn in front of the veranda and look at him from my wicker chair. I am thirsty. I get up and bring two glasses of water, one for the tailor and one for myself.

"Sahib, you should have asked me to get you some water. Don't you like me any more?"

"What is the difference?" I ask.

I sit back in my chair and look at him. He is lean and frail with a chest clamped between round shoulders, a bald head and a yellowed beard rich with color of age. He stops turning the wheel, leaves his stool on the veranda, and comes and sits on the ground at my feet.

"Take this chair, take this chair," I say, nervously standing up.

He puts both his gaunt hands on my knees and I drop back into the chair.

"Sahib, don't you like me any more? It's little things about you that trouble me. You won't let me cut you a suit like your English one because you don't trust me. You don't let me get you a glass of water because you don't like me. What has England done to you?"

He won't remove his hands from my knees, and he stubbornly keeps his position on the ground.

"Look here, tailor, I don't want an English suit because I am comfortable in pajamas and kurta."

"Sahib, I don't understand the world. Why have people stopped wearing suits? Why have all the Indian gentlemen started wearing ugly black coats with buttoned-up collars? Why does everyone want to look like their poor tailor? What is going to happen to my profession? When I saw you in the beautiful English suit, my heart went out to you. . . . Won't you let me cut you another? Never mind the rest of my customers. I'll work for you, Sahib, day and night, and it will be the best suit made in Delhi this year."

"But, tailor," I say, "you don't understand. A new English suit is the last thing I need. And about the water—I can get it as well as you can."

"Ved Sahib, your old servant and friend though I am, I would rather have you kick me than bring me a glass of water."

I try to explain to the tailor that he and I should be able to get each other water without his being hurt. But he sits at my feet holding my knees and refuses to accept my explanation. He feels offended. I stand up and nervously motion him to sit down in the chair. He looks even more hurt and shakes his puzzled beard. "What has England done to you? I don't understand. I could never sit in that chair and you know it. I have never sat in a chair and I don't want to."

As in the old days, the understanding really comes from him. I sit down. "Maybe I'm just old," he says. "Maybe I'm just ancient. Many of these young servants would like nothing better than a soft chair; they would let this grass grow under their feet until they were buried in it. They wouldn't lift a hand to cut it. By their rebellion they dig their own graves, and Sahib, you aren't helping them learn their station by offering them chairs."

"Tailor, there is no station. Everyone must make his own station."

He points to his scarred forehead. "My station is written here." Then he points to my forehead. "Your station is written there. It is all in the books of *karma* and *dharma*. My *karma* says I must be a tailor and my *dharma* says I must do my duty by my sahibs."

"Tailor, these are old ideas."

"I am an old man," he says, and he runs a finger through his yellowed beard. "But, Sahib, I am wise. You can no more change my station than I can change yours. You will marry in your caste, and I will marry my son to a girl in our own caste. You will send your children to England to be educated, and I will teach my grandsons to be good tailors."

"Come See Us, Heah?"

Editors' Introduction: It is not only Indians who try to change the occupational lines in India. Often visitors to India seek to "help" some seemingly unfortunate Indian. The following news item describes the result of such a gesture by the man who was then Vice-President of the United States, Lyndon B. Johnson. Johnson's encounter with the camel driver was in Pakistan, but it could just as well have been in India. What happened to the camel driver as a result of Johnson's "good deed"? Is there a lesson to be learned from this experience?

IT WAS A Texas-style gesture, but when Lyndon B. Johnson, on a 1961 Vice Presidential tour of Pakistan, urged an illiterate Karachi camel driver to "come see us, heah?" he unintentionally transformed the life of Bashir Ahmad, then 42. The Pakistani press printed LBJ's offhand remark as a serious invitation, and an embarrassed U.S. government had to make good on the Vice President's offer. So, with his expenses paid by private American groups, Bashir, a laborer who had been earning about $2 a day, arrived in the United States in the fall of 1961 for a VIP tour that included New York City, Washington, D.C., and, of course, the LBJ ranch. Bashir charmed his hosts with his disarming candor and witty Moslem proverbs, and he re-

Newsweek, March 17, 1969. Copyright Newsweek, Inc. 1969, reprinted by permission.

turned to Pakistan as a local celebrity. He gave up the life of a camel driver and began renting a truck donated to him by the Ford Motor Co. to the U.S. Embassy for $170 a month. But today, seven years later, Bashir lives obscurely in a government-sponsored housing project outside Karachi, hard put to support his wife and three school-age sons.

Now 50, Bashir has aged markedly, and he is beset by worries about his financial straits. The money from his truck rentals went to purchase his home, marry off a son, daughter, and niece, and buy a grocery store. But the American Embassy ceased renting the truck, now broken down and lying unused in the Embassy compound, after President Johnson left office, and Bashir has no job and no money with which to stock his store. "Now I do not know what to do," he laments. "I have come upon bad times. I'm trying to live my life, forgotten by friends, ridiculed by others. Even my eldest son has deserted me."

Bashir has tried to make his plight known to his "friend Johnson," but he has received no replies. "I know he is a nice man," Bashir says, "but I am sure my letters are stopped by the government officials here. They do not want a poor man like me to be a friend of a big man like Johnson." Still, despite the communications gap, Bashir retains his affection for LBJ. "He offered me hand of friendship and I grasped it. This friendship between us is for life." But Bashir now regrets ever having accepted Johnson's invitation. "It was bad for me. It left me unfit for my previous profession. If I had not gone to U.S.A. I would still be a hard-working camel driver. Now what am I? A worthless, lazy man, living on his past and hankering for things that are out of his reach."

What Is Caste?

Editors' Introduction: If you were to ask Ved Mehta's tailor, "What is your caste?" he would probably answer, "I am a tailor." Occupation is one definition of caste in India, but it is not the only one.

In Indian society there are four large classes, called *varnas*, that date back to 1,000 B.C.: Brahmin (priest), Kshatriya (ruler), Vaishya (businessman), and Shudra (worker). Each *varna* had its *dharma*. The Laws of Manu, written at least two hundred years before Christ, describe these four groups as follows:

> For the sake of prosperity of the worlds, he created the Brahmin, the Kshatriya, the Vaishya, and the Shudra . . .
>
> To Brahmins he assigned teaching and studying [the *Veda*], sacrificing for their own benefit and for others, giving and accepting [of alms].
>
> The Kshatriya he commanded to protect the people, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study [the *Veda*], and to abstain from attaching himself to sensual pleasures.
>
> The Vaishya to tend cattle, to bestow gifts, to offer sacrifices, to study [the *Veda*], to trade, to lend money, and to cultivate land.
>
> One occupation only the lord prescribed to the Shudra, to serve meekly even these three [other] castes.*

But these categories have always been more theoretical than real.

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* Ainslie Embree, *The Hindu Tradition* (New York: The Modern Library, 1966), pp. 79–80.

By Donald J. Johnson.

A Brahmin blows on his sacred conch in preparation for reading from the Ramayana. (Donald and Jean Johnson)

A land recorder (Kshatriya) uses a charpoy *(cot) as his office.* (Donald and Jean Johnson)

An oil presser (Shudra) in a south Indian village. (Donald and Jean Johnson)

India, from earliest times, has been divided into many small communities, known as *jati*. Today there are over three thousand *jati* in India. Each is distinct because it does not exchange food or intermarry with any other *jati*. But knowing these facts does not fully explain how the caste system functions in Indian society. To understand the complexity of the caste system, consider the following imaginary conversation between an American teacher and an Indian businessman. Does caste seem to be a problem to the Indian? What is caste?

American: I appreciate your willingness to explain caste to me. Most Indians tell me I couldn't possibly understand it and can only see caste as a problem. But I want to understand. Is it true that caste began when the light-skinned Aryans came to India and subdued the darker-skinned Dravidians?

Indian: Yes and no.

American: Do you mean yes or no?

Indian: I mean yes *and* no. The early Brahmins were probably Aryans, but many of the very strict Brahmins are in South India, and they are darker than some of the very low-caste people.

American: Then caste is not based on color?

Indian: That's right. Some high castes are dark, some are light. Low castes also are both dark and light.

American: Then race doesn't explain caste. What about rich and poor? Surely the high-caste Brahmins are richer than the low-caste workers—Shudra.

Indian: Again, yes and no. Many members of high castes are also well-born, with more education and better jobs, and would be considered "upper class" in your sense. Yet there are many poor Brahmins and rich Shudras. Apu's family in the movie "Pather Panchali" were very poor Brahmins. The night watchman in that office over there is Brahmin. But take the Nadars in South Indian. They were untouchables but are now among the most successful businessmen in the area.

AMERICAN: So caste isn't race or class. Would you agree that it is based on occupation?

INDIAN: You can guess my answer: yes and no. Occupation is an important feature of caste. Many names are occupational, like your Mr. Potter, Mr. Carpenter, Mr. Smith, Mr. Weaver, Mr. Taylor. Most of our craft groups are also caste groups. Sons follow their fathers' occupations, and daughters marry boys who do the same work as their fathers.

But there are also exceptions. Most Brahmins are not priests There are villages in North India where most of the farmers are Brahmins. The army is made up of hundreds of castes, and most of them are not from the Kshatriya or warrior group. In Kerela, the Nairs are the dominant caste, and they are not even in the top three *varnas*. Some of India's most important saints came from non-Brahmin castes. Gandhi became a saint, but he was of a commercial caste, and his name means grocer. It's like your John Smith who was a colonizer in America. Did he ever work as a blacksmith? So caste is not based just on occupation.

AMERICAN: It's easier to say what caste isn't than what it is. How about ethnic loyalty? Is caste membership like belonging to a Polish-American or an Italian-American group?

INDIAN: Yes and no. India does have thousands of different ethnic groups, many of which migrated here through the more than 4,000 years of Indian history. You probably know the Aryans, Muslims, and British. But there were also the Bactrians, the Kushans, the Huns, the Parsees, the Afghans, and hundreds of others. Many groups have different physical appearances and claim different histories. How did the Coorgs of South India come here? The Chitpavan Brahmins of Maharastra have blue eyes. Did they come from the Middle East? Are the Jats of North India descendants of the white Huns? One of our great anthropologists, Professor Karve, claimed that all caste members were blood-related. She explained caste as an expanded kinship system.

American: I give up. Let's say we just don't know why caste groups formed, how they came about, or why.

Indian: At last you've said something I can agree with.

American: Can we at least learn how many castes there are in India?

Indian: That depends on whether you mean the large groupings like Brahmins, Jat, Nairs, etc., or the thousands of so-called subcastes.

American: Don't tell me you can't answer this either. How many subcastes?

Indian: No one has ever counted them, but there are several thousand. There are 550 subcastes of untouchables alone. In the Delhi area, there are hundreds of Brahmin castes.

American: This is really getting complicated. Let's forget numbers. Can you tell me how a caste acts—any caste?

Indian: Well, behavior, rituals, and taboos are different for each one. I'm a member of the Srivastava community.

American: How does that affect your life?

Indian: Well, in spite of the fact I live in Delhi, my caste is always a part of my life. My wife, naturally, is a Srivastava. She comes from a family that has known my family for more years than we can remember. Because she is a Srivastava, she knows the food I like, the religious rituals I am used to, she tells our children stories from the *Ramayana*, the same ones I was told as a child. In a thousand unconscious ways, her behavior will echo mine because we are members of the same caste. Marriage almost always takes place within one caste for these reasons. Sometimes women marry into a higher caste, but men hardly ever.

Eating is another thing. My mother, sixty years old now, will not take food from a lower caste. My partner's a Brahmin. In his home I do not ask for food, although we eat in restaurants together. Perhaps this practice came about as a protection from disease. Maybe it's a way to preserve one's culture. You have that in America, don't you? Russian-Americans like their Borscht; Italians prefer their spaghetti; not everyone likes soul food.

Then there's the matter of social life. Most of us prefer to be with members of our own group because we have more in common. We share a history, a tradition; we laugh at the same jokes. Don't you feel more at home with other northern Europeans like yourself? And don't answer by telling me, "Some of my best friends are black."

Then there's the loyalty. If I'm in trouble I can always count on my family and my community. No matter where I travel in India, I know caste members will accept me. Even when I travel to your country, another Srivastava will take me in. It's good to know you are never alone. Being part of a community really matters; it gives meaning to life, although the community also imposes restrictions on its own members.

AMERICAN: How can you tell the difference between a high caste and a low one?

INDIAN: It has to do with ritual purity. A Kshatriya king may be powerful and a Vaishya trader may be rich, but their ritual status is lower than that of the poorest Brahmin.

AMERICAN: Well, either some castes are higher than others or they aren't.

INDIAN: Why must you Americans always insist on thing's being either one way or another? Things aren't always black or white.

AMERICAN: We'll discuss philosophy another time. Now we're discussing sociology.

INDIAN: That might be one reason you have trouble understanding India, but, as you say, let's get back to the point. High and low castes have a lot to do with purity—ritual purity. We Hindus have divided everything into pure and impure. That's not the same as sanitary or unsanitary, I might add. For example, meat eating, especially beef, is polluting; alcohol is polluting to some, and so are occupations dealing with the body, like cutting hair. Animal skinning and garbage collecting are also polluting jobs. On the other hand, bathing is ritually purifying; fire can be purifying; the water of the Ganges is purifying. Generally, the more purified the daily life, the higher the caste. Less ritually pure behavior means lower caste, although there are exceptions.

AMERICAN: How does a low-caste person feel about this? Does he want to move up?

INDIAN: Many lower-caste members probably think they are exactly where they should be; that it's a result of deeds done, good or bad, in past lives. Others may think moving up is a good thing. Let me give you one example. The Chamars, people who used to do mainly cow skinning, have a caste tradition that they used to be Brahmins, but long ago one of them was trying to help a cow out of the mud by pulling on its tail and the cow died just as some people were passing by. The Chamars were accused of killing the cow and were polluted by that and condemned to live in a low caste. Caste has never been as rigid as many think. In ancient times people moved up quite often. The scriptures and epics like the *Mahabharata* speak of this a lot. One of our great anthropologists, Prof. Srinivas, has studied this moving up the scale by caste. He calls the process Sanskritization.

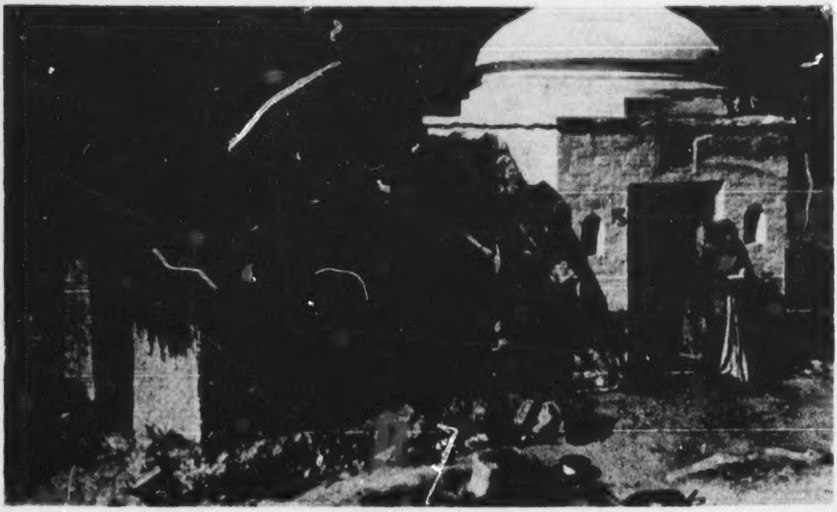
AMERICAN: What does that mean?

INDIAN: It is quite simple, actually. Sanskrit was and is the classical language of India. It is associated with high culture, often Brahmin culture. It's more than a language, really, it's a way of life. Sanskrit culture means the highest culture. When a lower caste imitates the behavior of an upper, often Brahmin, caste, that's called "Sanskritization." It doesn't mean that the lower caste learns to speak Sanskrit.

AMERICAN: I can understand moving up as a caste group, but

I don't quite understand that way of imitating upper-caste behavior. I thought moving up the scale meant driving a bigger car, getting invited to fancy parties, doing things that were more fun.

INDIAN: Don't forget we're talking about India, not America. The upper castes in India are associated with ritual purity. So a caste that makes its move upward often imitates this ritual purity of the Brahmins. If a low caste eats meat, it might become vegetarian when it moves up; it might perform religious rituals more carefully; it might stop drinking alcohol. It might even change its caste name in the hope that other people will think it is a higher caste.



This untouchable woman has built a small temple next to her house. She is "reading" a book that consists of two words: "Sita-Ram." (Donald and Jean Johnson)

AMERICAN: But that's no fun. In America, going up the ladder means you live better.

Indian: I told you, this is India, not America. Remember the Nadars I spoke of earlier—the untouchable caste that moved up in South India? One of the ways they spent their new money was on building temples. That's because temple building is associated with the upper castes. By the way, didn't your John D. Rockefeller build a cathedral in New York?

American: Yes, I guess he did.

Indian: There's one more thing. Here in India we hardly ever refer to the "caste system" or to caste at all. "Caste" is a Portuguese word. We speak of our *community* instead. Of course, "community" doesn't mean to us what you mean by the word. It means all the things we've been talking about. And more.

American: It's certainly complicated.

Indian: Yes and no. Yes, if you're looking at it from the outside; no, if you're a part of it.

Untouchability

Editors' Introduction: Many people confuse the caste system with untouchability. Traditionally, the untouchables, who were responsible for the unclean work of society, were outside the four major castes. They collected dead animals and skinned them, swept the streets and carried away the human waste, washed the clothes, and delivered the babies. These jobs were considered unclean, both ritually and literally. Because those who performed these tasks often carried diseases, people feared contact with them, so over the years they became "untouchable."

Quarantining diseased people is an accepted means of preventing infection in many societies. However, this practice became extremely rigid in India and evolved into the untouchable system, prohibiting all contact between untouchables and caste Hindus. In some areas of India, untouchables had to ring a bell to announce their approach so that not even their shadow would fall on one in the higher castes. Money that passed through their hands had to be rinsed off; food that they received in payment for work was tossed to them.

Mahatma Gandhi, the great leader of India's independence movement, worked for much of his life to eliminate untouchability. He renamed the untouchables *Harijans*—children of God. He was as interested in seeing untouchability eliminated as he was in seeing India gain *swaraj* ("self-government"). The following selection is from a speech he delivered before a Convention of Untouchables

From an Address by M. K. Gandhi. Reprinted from *The Gandhi Reader* by Homer Jack, pp. 162–67, by permission of Indiana University Press.

in April, 1921. Note the way he uses the Hindu epics, the *Ramayana* and the *Mahabharata.*

I REGARD UNTOUCHABILITY as the greatest blot on Hinduism. . . .

I was hardly yet twelve when this idea had dawned on me. A scavenger named Uka, an untouchable, used to attend our house for cleaning latrines. Often I would ask my mother why it was wrong to touch him, why I was forbidden to touch him. If I accidentally touched Uka, I was asked to perform the [ritual] ablutions, and though I naturally obeyed, it was not without smilingly protesting that untouchability was not sanctioned by religion, that is was impossible that it should be so. I was a very dutiful and obedient child and so far as it was consistent with respect for parents, I often had tussles with them on this matter. I told my mother that she was entirely wrong in considering physical contact with Uka as sinful.

While at school I would often happen to touch the "untouchables," and as I never would conceal the fact from my parents, my mother would tell me that the shortest cut to purification after the unholy touch was to cancel the touch by touching any Mussalman [muslim] passing by. And simply out of reverence and regard for my mother I often did so, but never did so believing it to be a religious obligation. . . .

The *Ramayana* used to be regularly read in our family. A Brahmin called Ladha Maharaj used to read it. He was stricken with leprosy, and he was confident that a regular reading of the *Ramayana* would cure him of leprosy, and, indeed he was cured of it. "How can the *Ramayana,*" I thought to myself, "in which one who is regarded nowadays as an untouchable took Rama across the Ganges in his boat, countenance the idea of any human beings being untouchable on the ground that they were polluted souls?" The fact that we addressed God as the "purifier of the polluted" and by similar appellations shows that it is a sin to regard anyone born into Hinduism as polluted or untouchable—that it is satanic to do so. I have hence been never tired of repeating that it is a great sin. . . .

There was a time when I was wavering between Hinduism and Christianity. When I recovered my balance of mind, I felt that to me salvation was possible only through the Hindu religion, and my faith in Hinduism grew deeper and more enlightened.

But even then I believed that untouchability was no part of Hinduism and that, if it was, such Hinduism was not for me. . . .

So long as the Hindus willfully regard untouchability as part of their religion, so long as the mass of Hindus consider it a sin to touch a section of their brethren, *swaraj* ["self-government"] is impossible of attainment. Yudhishthira [a hero of the *Mahabharata*] would not enter heaven without his [unclean] dog. How, then, can the descendants of that Yudhishthira expect to obtain *swaraj* without the untouchables? What crimes, for which we condemn the [British] government as satanic, have not we been guilty of toward our untouchable brethren?

We are guilty of having suppressed our brethren; we make them crawl on their bellies; we have made them rub their noses on the ground; with eyes red with rage, we push them out of railway compartments—what more than this has British Rule done? . . . We ought to purge ourselves of this pollution. . . .

If it can bring any comfort to you, my untouchable brethren, I would say that your question does not cause so much stir as it used to do formerly. That does not mean that I expect you to cease to have misgivings about the Hindus. How can they deserve not to be mistrusted, having wronged you so much? Swami Vivekananda used to say that the untouchables were not depressed, they were suppressed by the Hindus, who in turn had suppressed themselves by suppressing them.

You should realize that you are cleaning Hindu society. You have therefore to purify your lives. You should cultivate the habits of cleanliness, so that no one may point his finger at you. Use alkali ash or earth, if you cannot afford to use soap, to keep yourselves clean. Some of you are given to

Animal skinners (untouchables) learning improved methods of hide processing. (United Nations)

drinking and gambling, which you must get rid of. You will point your finger at the Brahmins and say even they are given to these vices. But they are not looked upon as polluted, and you are. You must not ask the Hindus to emancipate you as a matter of favor. Hindus must do so, if they want, in their own interest. You should, therefore, make them feel ashamed by your own purity and cleanliness.

I have come in contact with the untouchables all over the country, and I have observed that immense possibilities lie latent in them of which neither they nor the rest of the Hindus seem to be aware. Their intellect is of virginal purity. I ask you to learn spinning and weaving. If you take them up as a profession, you will keep poverty from your doors. As regards your attitude toward the *bhangis* ["scavengers"], . . . I cannot understand why you should yourselves countenance the distinction between *dheds* [a weaver caste reduced to untouchables] and *bhangis*. There is no difference between them. Even in normal times their occupation is as honorable as that of lawyers or government servants.

"Let Every Caste Be Touchable"

Editors' Introduction: Untouchability was abolished by law in the Indian Constitution in 1949. Legally, all who had been untouchable were now "ex-untouchables." But eliminating the pain of the thousands of years of untouchability—or the practice—is not accomplished merely by passing a law. Think of the legacy of racial segregation and the condition of black Americans today. Have civil rights laws solved that problem?

Like racial discrimination within the United States, caste discrimination and untouchability still exist all over India. However, the problem is less severe in cities, where all kinds of people travel side by side in city buses and eat together in restaurants. But even in the cities, former untouchables face many problems. Harold Isaacs, an American scholar, discusses some of these problems in the following excerpts from his book *India's Ex-Untouchables*. Which of these problems are similar to those faced by minority groups in America? Which are unique to the Indian setting?

THE [INDIAN] GOVERNMENT, itself caught by so much ambivalence and conflict over the caste system, is committed to giving the ex-untouchables special help. It is doing this not only by helping them through school but by opening the way afterward to jobs. Since ex-untouchables cannot hope to find

Harold Isaacs, *India's Ex-Untouchables* (New York: John Day, 1965). Available in a Harper and Row paperback, 1974. Reprinted with the kind permission of the author.

jobs in a society still dominated by caste-bound Hindus, the government has opened its own services and has set up quotas of reserved places for them to fill as they qualify.

This system of "reserved places" or "reservations" began well back in the British time, mainly for the benefit of the non-Brahmin lower castes, and came partly as a result of the non-Brahmin fight against Brahmin domination. It has been enormously expanded by the government of independent India. It is now the lifeline by which more and more people are pulling themselves—or are being pulled—out of the cesspools of untouchability.

[The problem with the compensatory policy of "reserved places" is that it accentuates one's former untouchability rather than working to eliminate it. Another "solution" is for untouchables to try to pass themselves off as members of another caste.]

Many of those who have moved up in life have naturally continued to find it easier to "pass" in many situations than not to, and . . . this often meant not falsifying your identity but not proclaiming it either. . . . Wherever it was needful or possible, you would pass, whether while traveling or even, in a more consistent way, at your place of work, where what other people did not know could never hurt you. The need to "pass" on a more consistent basis seemed to come most often out of the effort to get better housing.

But there are serious limits to how far and for how long an educated ex-untouchable can continue to pass successfully in India today. . . . [As one informant explained:]

> If a man conceals his caste, sooner or later it is discovered, and then he suffers a lot. There was a Mahar, a contractor who got rich. He told everybody he was a Mahratta. He lived in a caste Hindu community and never disclosed his caste. But then his daughter died. The custom is that your relatives must come to prepare the body,

> not yourself or a stranger. But nobody came. No Mahrattas came, of course. He had cut himself off from his relatives, so they didn't come. Some of his friends and neighbors came and said to him: "How is it nobody is here? Call your nearest relative now, right away!" In desperation he finally called on some of his old people to come to lift the body. When they came, the neighbors recognized them from their clothes, their language, the way they talked, and his caste was disclosed. He suffered. We say to such a man, "You see, you wanted to be a Brahmin or a Mahratta, why should we feel sympathy for you?"

Marriage remains the most formidable barrier in the path of anyone who wishes to escape his caste. Intercaste marriage among . . . Hindus is less infrequent in India now than it was a generation ago, but such marriages involving [untouchables] are still extremely rare.

The point about marriage is that ex-untouchables who pass are unlikely to find mates for their children outside their caste, and if they do, they are unlikely to be able to keep their own caste background hidden. "It is possible, but not very likely," said one informant. "In India everybody knows everybody's caste one way or another, sooner or later. The educated people can separate, yet they can't separate, for community is part of this society. You can't be without a community. Without a community, it is awkward for a man in all his relationships. This is the culture of the country. *In India you have got to be connected.*"

The inescapable facts of caste life in India have led some ex-untouchables to devise an in-between style, a kind of semi-passing, as the solution to their problems. Put a bit roughly, it is a system for passing in public while not passing in private. In general it means that in all situations where self-advancement, comfort, and convenience dictate it, an ex-untouchable passes as a member of some higher caste. At the same time, in all the circumstances that demand it—death, marriage, even voluntary work for the community—he leads a second or double life in the bosom of his community.

[Another way out is to convert to a different faith, such as Buddhism, Christianity, or Islam. But many do not regard this step as necessary.

One young woman who had become a physician explained it the following way:]

> God has created us in this community and we are proud. I want to see our community come up to a higher level, to the standard of the others. It shall remain a caste, but will become like the others. . . . At present, marriage should stay within the caste. In the future if conditions change, it may not matter, but I would want my children to marry in the caste. We will tell our children that they are of our community. We will explain so that they will understand and know and help our community. . . .

This was essentially Gandhi's view of the way out: to preserve the caste system but to reform it by doing away with untouchability, to give the untouchables access to the temples, access to the common utilities such as wells, and assistance to raise their conditions of life to some more tolerable level, such as getting the night soil off their heads and into wheelbarrows. . . . What has been legally "abolished" is not caste but untouchability, and the problem is to transform this legal fact into social reality. Let the untouchable groups cross that line and rejoin the mass of lowly Shudras, let them remain as humble as they might be, let them retain all their divisions and subdivisions like everyone else, but let them be *touchable*. . . .

Flickering here and there among these thoughts of the future was the gleam of an idea larger than untouchability and surviving caste. This was the notion that there was a larger common identity for all to share, an identity called Indian. . . .

> When anybody asks me, I say: "I belong to this nation, India. I'm an *Indian*." If they persist after that, I say: "Who are you, somebody from the census bureau?" And they keep quiet. I suppose they think: "He's an educated Mahar." And if they do, I am not ashamed. I am proud of this community, it is a fighting community, an honest

community. But I do really *feel* like an *Indian*. This is the best answer. I consider myself one with my country.

As it does for so many Negro Americans, the question remained whether the rest of the people of his country were—or ever would be—one with him.

The Caste System in Action

◆§*Editors' Introduction:* We have been considering a widening circle of relationships around the individual Indian: first the family, then the caste. We now turn to the interaction of castes in the life of the larger village community.

It was Dr. William Wiser, the American missionary-sociologist, who first identified for Westerners the complex and ingenious interdependency of the castes and the ways in which goods and services were exchanged in the village. He called it the *jajmani* system, because those who owned land and produced food were known as *jajmans*. Dr. Wiser realized that villagers were permanently attached to certain *jajmans* and would perform their craft only for these *jajmans*. In return, they could count on a share of the *jajmans'* harvest and other payments such as meals, clothes, timber, dung, and sometimes moral support and financial aid in legal matters. When times were hard, the *jajman* was obliged to share with his workers as long as he had grain.

Because payment was usually in goods and services rather than in cash, few had reason to go outside the village for their needs. Because the relationships of *jajmans* and workers were hereditary, each could depend on the other. Villagers needed each other but had no reason to fear losing their jobs to more ambitious neighbors or because their *jajmans* were displeased with the quality of their work.

In the following selection, Taya Zinkin discusses the *jajmani*

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*Taya Zinkin, *Caste Today*, published for the Institute of Race Relations, London, by the Oxford University Press, 1962, pp. 30–31. © Institute of Race Relations, 1962. Reprinted with permission.

system. How does the *jajmani* system fit into the life of a modern Indian city?

◆

Many of India's professions and services are conducted on a *jajmani* basis. Particular barbers, washermen, or smiths are attached to particular patrons. Payment is in kind, perhaps twice a year at harvest, with a few extra duties and gifts on special occasions. Patrons do not look around for better smiths or barbers who know the latest hair style, nor do the barbers and smiths go round looking for patrons who pay more or grumble less. The relationship is both implicit and hereditary. This is often carried into city life.

When I moved into a flat in Bombay I inherited my predecessor's washerman. He was clean, reliable, and pleasant, and I had nothing but satisfaction from him until he suddenly went back to his village without warning and a "cousin-brother" of his came to take his place. The new washerman was stupid, inefficient, unreliable; he did not clean the wash, he lost clothes and replaced them with other people's, he broke all the buttons.

After much grumbling and complaint, I decided to change over to another washerman, for it looked as if this man had come to Bombay for good. My own servants, who had been very critical of the new washerman, were most uncooperative in finding another, [and] my own efforts through friends failed; no washerman worth his salt wanted to take away the custom of a colleague, for in their eyes I belonged to my servant.

At the end of a year my old washerman came back, undisturbed; he knew that his cousin was no good, but he also knew that he would not lose a customer. When, after a couple of years, he returned to his village, the cousin turned up once more to destroy my clothes. But I had learned my lesson; I did not attempt to change him; I merely cut his pay to compensate for damage done, and he did not protest.

Besides private service, the *jajmani* system covers communal service, such as sweeping village streets, removing dead cattle, cleaning ponds. Such work is remunerated quite often by special begging days, during which the village servants beg from their patrons enough to help them make both ends meet. It is partly because so many payments are in kind in this way that it is so difficult for either side to break away. Certain families have hereditary *jajmani* relationships with the guardians of temples or shrines hundreds of miles distant to which they will make pilgrimage once in a generation.

Before the *Panchayat*

Editors' Introduction: Caste relationships and the *jajmani* system, like the joint family and the arranged marriage, work best when each person accepts and performs his *dharma*. Each caste has its own brotherhood, a loose and undefined community that serves each member in time of need and enforces certain rights and duties. These brotherhoods see to it that marriages are arranged at the proper time and that the groom and his wedding party are properly served. If anyone breaks the rules of the caste, he can be excommunicated by the brotherhood. This usually means that he cannot smoke the water pipe with the other men and also makes arranging a marriage and other ceremonies difficult. The brotherhood may embarrass a member by not helping at the time of a wedding or a burial. Remember, in India "you have got to be connected."

As people have moved away from their village communities, the brotherhoods have lost some of their power. People now tend to decide issues as individuals rather than as communities guided by custom. Codified law and impersonal law courts have also weakened the brotherhoods. One can lie before a strange judge; it is difficult to lie to one's fellow caste members.

The caste brotherhoods enforced the rules within a caste. But when there was friction between castes, the matter was often referred to the *Panchayat*. Traditionally, the *Panchayat* consisted of the five (*Panch* means "five") most respected elders of the village.

Adapted from Tarasankar Banerjee, *The Temple Pavilion* (Bombay: Pearl Publications, 1969), Chapter 1. Printed with the permission of IBH Publishing Company, Bombay—400 005.

Since independence in 1947, members of the *Panchayat* have been elected by the village.

Changes in the pattern of village life often made it difficult for some castes to perform their traditional occupation. When this upset the balance of life in the village, the *Panchayat* usually tried to settle the problem. The following dramatic reading, adapted from a early twentieth-century Bengali novel, illustrates this function of the *Panchayat*. The problem, however, is never solved in the novel. Can you suggest a solution?

In the following excerpt, the blacksmith and carpenter have stopped serving their hereditary roles in the village and have set up shop in a neighboring town. The disgruntled villagers, unable to get their tools made or repaired, have referred the matter to the *Panchayat*. The *Panchayat* has summoned the blacksmith and carpenter to appear, and the villagers gather round to hear the debate.

BLACKSMITH (*haughtily*): Now then, gentlemen, tell us what it is you wish to say. We work for our living. Coming here is costing us half a day.

SRIHARI (rich landowner): Why did you come then, if you consider it time wasted?

HARENDRA (Brahmin): You can leave right now if you want to. Nobody forced you to come and nobody will force you to stay!!

HARISH (prosperous farmer): Be quiet, both of you. The smith and the carpenter were requested to be present at this meeting. They had to come. It's good that you have come; it's fine; it's excellent. Both parties in the dispute will get a hearing. We shall say what we have to say and you will answer. Then the case will be decided. This can't be done in a hurry, can it?

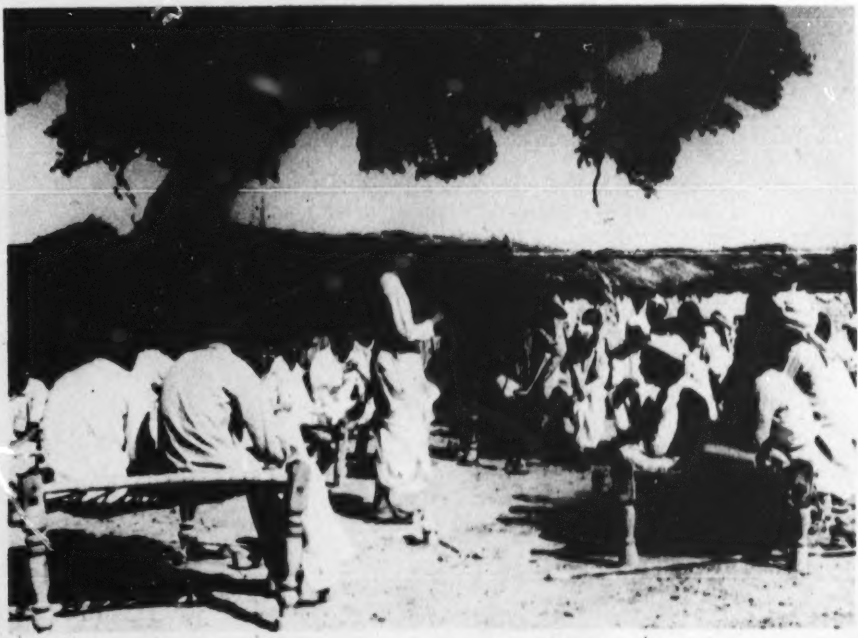
CARPENTER (*mock surprise*): Then what you have to say has reference to us?

BLACKSMITH: That's what we thought. Now, please, tell us what's the matter. We will answer your questions. But who is to decide the case? How can a complainant also judge? We do not understand.

Panditji (revered elder): Blacksmith-ji, please excuse me for what I am going to say, but the tone you have taken from the outset leads me to think you have come here prepared to quarrel. This is not the way to begin a meeting of this kind. Sit down and compose yourself.

Blacksmith (*somewhat subdued*): Very well. Please tell us what the charges are against us.

Harish: I'll be brief. [*Everyone snickers.*] To explain at length would take nothing short of an epic. You two have started doing business in town. That's very good. It's natural enough for men to go where they can earn best. But you have stopped doing any work in the village. We have to carry our tools and push our cartwheels across the river



Villagers gathered for a discussion with a Panchayat *leader.* (United Nations) into the town when they need repair. How can we put up with this state of things? This year you have certainly given us a great deal of trouble. Try to realize that.

BLACKSMITH: It is a little inconvenient for you, I admit.

SRIHARI: A little!!! What do you mean a little???!!! Don't you realize that ploughing was held up after the water had come into the fields because the ploughs weren't sharpened in time? You also have some land. Go and take a look at it. See how fine the grass is growing! The ploughs were so blunt not a root of grass came out. When the harvest is brought in, you two will turn up on time, bringing your sacks for your share of the grain. What have you done in return for it? Nothing but sit in town. Can it be allowed?

EVERYONE: That's right. That's what happened.

BLACKSMITH: So that is your complaint. Now, please listen to what we have to say. We sharpen your ploughshares, put rims on your cartwheels, forge sickles for you, and what then? You give us five small measures of rice per plough.

CARPENTER: I get only four measures per plough.

BLACKSMITH: And even this amount is not always paid in full.

PANDITJI: Certainly everyone should pay you in full. But you, for your part, should keep at least a small smithy open in the village and work for us as before.

EVERYONE: That's right. That's only right. (The blacksmith and the carpenter remain silent and impassive).

DEBNATH (farmer's son, now a primary school teacher): Panditji's proposal seems only fair. Of course you must be paid your full share, but you must do your *dharma* and serve the village. Come, brothers, you ought not to object.

PANDITJI: Well, blacksmith, what do you say?

BLACKSMITH (*slowly, thoughtfully*): Kindly excuse us, your honor. We cannot do it.

ALL (*general displeasure*): Why not? What's the matter? It's only fair? Don't you live in the village?

PANDITJI (*waving his arms in an effort to get order*): Silence, please. Shouting doesn't help. Let the blacksmith speak.

He'll explain why he can't accept our plan. [*Gently, addressing the blacksmith*] Tell us, son, why you don't like our proposal. You can't just refuse. Your family has done our work for generations. What will the village do if you refuse?

Harish: Your forefathers lived in another village. There was no blacksmith in this village, and your great-grandfather was invited to come and live here. You know all that, son. How can you refuse us now?

Blacksmith: Then hear me, your honor. Panditji, you be the judge. How many ploughs are there in the village today? How many ploughs were there in my great-grandfather's day? How many families have given up ploughing? Godai, Srinivas, Mahendra . . . Eleven families have abandoned their ploughs in my time. I've counted them. Their lands have passed into the hands of the gentlemen of Konkona. And Konkona has its own blacksmith. The result is that I receive that much less grain.

Panditji: That's true. What you have said cannot be denied.

Blacksmith: Then consider. During the ploughing season we made and repaired ploughs, put iron rims on cartwheels, and at other times we worked on house construction. We made nails, bolts, screws, chains, pins, knives, kitchen utensils, spades, mattocks, and so on. All of you villagers bought from us. But now, now you prefer to buy from the town market. The market products are cheaper, you say. How are we to live?

Carpenter: I used to make carts, doors, windows. Whenever a house needed a new roof I was called on to make the frame. Now people bring workmen from outside who do the work more cheaply. So we get less—and the price of rice has gone up.

Blacksmith: The price of everything else has gone up, too. How can we provide for our families if we sit back and do nothing? Tell me! I am a married man. And our way of life is changing.

The Smith Family Moves by Bicycle

Editors' Introduction: The winds of change are stirring all over India. Not the least of the institutions affected by these changes is the caste system. Yet, even though caste changes, it keeps many of its identifying features. The last selection described a blacksmith and a carpenter who resisted the hold of the *jajmani* system. The following selection describes another blacksmith family and the changes in their status over a generation. If you met the two brothers today and asked what caste they were in, what do you think they would reply?

IN VILLAGES EVERYWHERE it is still the normal practice for a carpenter's son to become a carpenter, a weaver's son to become a weaver, and a potter's son to become a potter, not only for practical reasons, but because these professions are regulated by caste unless the son goes to school and for long enough. Then alone he qualifies to break through the caste custom of inheriting his profession, though it is usually only to seek a white-collar job of some description. [There are no caste names for these new jobs.]

In a small village in Gurdaspur District, however, there

From *Blossoms in the Dust: The Human Factor in Indian Development*, by Kusum Nair (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1962). Copyright © 1961 by Kusum Nair. Reprinted by permission.

lived an ordinary blacksmith named Rattan Singh. Totally illiterate, he used to manufacture locks, small brass ones and some big ones, and also the bit for the horse's rein. Rattan Singh's clients were local landlords who paid him in kind. His house had one brick wall facing the village lane; the others were all of mud. The entrance opened into a yard where he did his work and beyond were a couple of small dark rooms in which the family lived.

Rattan Singh had two sons. He did not send them to school. But neither did he train them to become blacksmiths like himself, though by prevailing standards business was good. Instead he advised the boys, when they were ten and fourteen years old, to go to Batala town, about ten miles away, and learn what must, at the time, have been the latest thing—sewing-machine repair work. He bought them, almost from scrap, one bicycle costing twelve rupees, which would serve for their transport. This was in 1922. Four years later, when the brothers decided to work on their own, their father gave them one rupee and four annas to get started.

Unable to buy a sewing machine or its parts with the capital at their disposal, the two brothers initiated a business on the open pavement of a busy street. While one of them painted simple designs on small pieces of glass which are used for decorating bridal beds, the other purchased a tube of solution and a piece of rubber and offered to repair cycle punctures. He earned three annas on the first day.

"The town did not have a single cycle-repair shop in those days," they recall. There used to be only an enterprising gardener who repaired punctured tubes in his spare time at the house of the client. "Batala, of course, was more like an overgrown village. . . . In 1926 it had seven bicycles in all. We can even tell you the names of the owners."

In 1959, the same town must have at least 70,000 bicycles on the road, and the two brothers have become the manufacturers of cycle rims of high quality which find a ready market as far away as Delhi and beyond. Rattan Singh, the village blacksmith, used to sell his locks for a handful of grain. The turnover of his sons' business is in the neighborhood of 250,000 rupees per annum.

The Singh brothers live in Batala now in middle-class style, in double-storied houses which they have built themselves. By caste they continue to be blacksmiths, but not by profession. Their ancestral village is still there off the main Upper Bari Doab Canal. It is not very different from what it used to be in the 1920's. A car cannot enter its lanes, and it has the usual complement of children, goats, cowdung piles, dirt heaps, mud walls, and a few brick houses. There are green fields of wheat and mustard; sturdy Sikh peasants are working in them. Flights of parakeets catch the winter sun on their wings. Rattan Singh's house is crumbling, empty.

What Do Hindus Believe?

Editors' Introduction: Thus far the reading selections have all been about the concerns of the first two stages of life: the student and the householder. During the first half of his life a man devotes himself to his material well-being and happiness and to his community (caste) duties and privileges. But there are two more stages, and in these a man leaves worldly concerns and seeks to experience the ultimate reality of *moksha* ("oneness with God").

Hans, the young German in *The Householder* (pp. 86–90), came to India expecting to find every Indian searching for God and seeking *moksha.* He was disappointed, of course, because he was chasing a stereotype. If he had been more sensitive and had looked more deeply, he might have found part of what he came to see. He might have sensed, as many readings in this book have shown, that Hindu assumptions about life underlie the daily lives of many Indians. And he might indeed have sensed in some Indians a longing for release from the world. These perceptions would require him to have some understanding of the assumptions and beliefs of Hinduism.

The next four readings (written by the editors but based mainly on Hindu scriptures) attempt to clarify some of the religious concepts of the Hindu way of life. Hinduism, like every religion, offers the universal questions man has grappled with for centuries: Is there a God? What is the meaning of life? What is right? Why is there suffering and injustice? What is death?

Many Americans, in their search for a spiritual dimension in their lives, have turned toward India. It is commonplace these days

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By Donald and Jean Johnson.

to read newspaper stories about the arrival of Indian *gurus* in the United States or about transcendental meditation or *yoga*. Young people are visiting *ashrams* (Hindu religious centers) or setting up their own communes where they practice *yoga* and vegetarianism. Some Americans travel all the way to India or Japan to study Hinduism or Buddhism at the source. The late writer Paul Goodman noted this trend: "The most important quality of the youth movement of the 1960's is its religious dimension." Hinduism has played an important role in this search for religious meaning, not only as a possible source of answers itself but also as an influence on Western religions.

You may or may not find the Hindu assumptions acceptable, but as you come to understand them, your appreciation of man's search for meaning will have been extended beyond your own cultural traditions. How relevant for the modern world do you think the beliefs described in the next four readings are? What similarities or differences do you find between Hinduism and Western religions?

As You Sow, So Shall You Reap: Karma

"Two days ago the marriage feast was mine,
And only yesterday I bought milch kine [milk cows]
Wherewith to start my modest home. My field
Is bright with corn, with gold my coffers yield,
I cannot die." While yet thou speakest, fool,
Dread Yama's [God of Death] step comes near. Farewell, vile soul.

Chorus: How near is death! Mercy he cannot bring.
Then, oh my heart, cease from the world, and cling
With all thy power to tender Lakshmi's King [Vishau, the God of Preservation].

"My house is newly built. E'en now they say
The Mantras [holy verses] that have power to drive away
All evils from my home. My wife is great
With child. The day that weds my son we wait.
Life is so good, I cannot, will not, die."
Vain fool! Death's hand now shades thy glazing eye.

Chorus: How near is death! &c.

Canarese folk-song, "The Nearness of Death," from Charles E. Cover, *The Folk-Songs of Southern India* (Madras: South India Saiva Siddhanta Works Publishing Society, 1959), p. 18.

Death can come at any time, as this Canarese folk song suggests. But to the Hindu death is but one point on the great span of endless time. An individual dies, but in India that is not the end of his story. All Hindus know:

> To him that is born, death is sure
> And for him who has died, birth is certain.
> This cannot be changed.*

Another Hindu scripture explains:

> As the body of mortals undergoes the changes of infancy, youth and old age, even so will it be transformed, into another body hereafter; a sensible man is not mistaken about that. As a man puts on new clothes in this world, throwing aside those which he formerly wore, even so the self of man puts on new bodies which are in accordance with his acts in a former life.†

Although an individual may die, his life force or soul (called *atman*) never dies; it takes on a new form with each birth. *Samsara* ("rebirth") is more than a belief to the Hindu or Buddhist. It is the certainty on which all life is based.

In what form will one be reborn? How is that determined? Snoopy asks the same question (see page 130).

The factor that determines the form in which you will be born in your next existence is your *karma*. If you have lived a good life, you build up good *karma* and will be born into a higher station, or to a happier life. If you perform bad deeds, you build up bad *karma* and are certain to suffer in succeeding lives. Good and bad *karma* are built up over generations, the balance being passed on to future lives.

In the New Testament, Saint Matthew states, "As a man soweth, so also shall he reap." The difference between this statement and *karma* is that to St. Matthew, a man's deeds are

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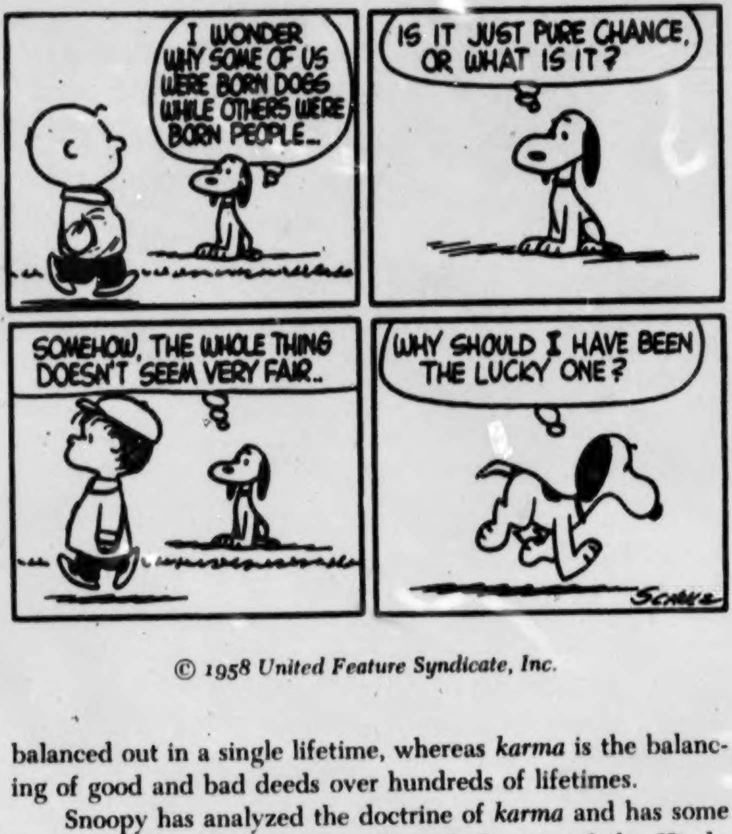
* From *The Bhagavad Gita* translated by Ann Stanford. © 1970 by Herder & Herder, Inc. Used by permission of the publisher, The Seabury Press, New York. 2:27.

† Louis Renon, *Hinduism* (New York: George Braziller, 1961), p. 129.


I WONDER WHY SOME OF US WERE BORN DOGS WHILE OTHERS WERE BORN PEOPLE..
IS IT JUST PURE CHANCE, OR WHAT IS IT?
SOMEHOW, THE WHOLE THING DOESN'T SEEM VERY FAIR..
WHY SHOULD I HAVE BEEN THE LUCKY ONE?
SCHULZ

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balanced out in a single lifetime, whereas *karma* is the balancing of good and bad deeds over hundreds of lifetimes.

Snoopy has analyzed the doctrine of *karma* and has some thoughts (see page 131). The Upanishads, one of the Hindu holy books, describes this process:

> Those whose conduct here [on earth] has been good will quickly attain some good birth—birth as a Brahmin, birth as a Kshatriya, or birth as a Vaishya. But those whose conduct here has been evil will quickly attain some evil birth—birth as a dog, birth as a pig, or birth as a *chandala* ("untouchable").*

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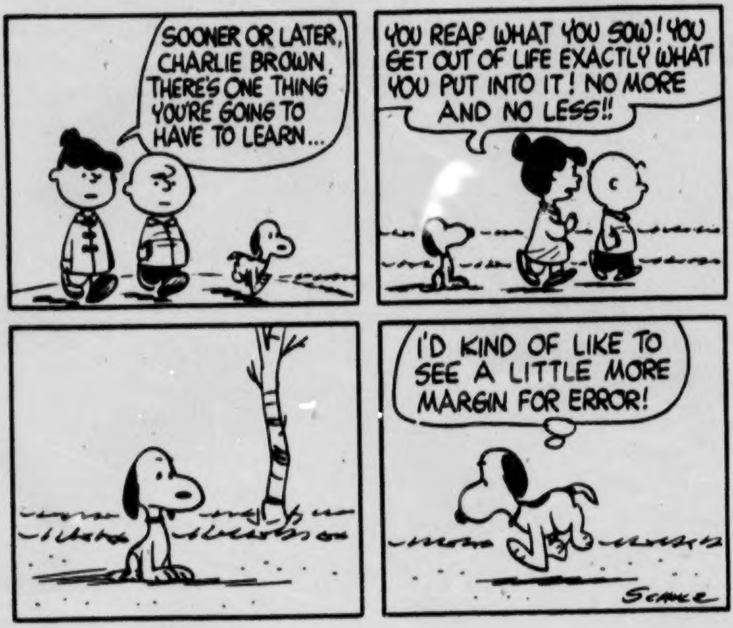
* Nikhilanarda, *The Upanishads* (New York: Harper and Row, 1964), p. 321.


SOONER OR LATER, CHARLIE BROWN, THERE'S ONE THING YOU'RE GOING TO HAVE TO LEARN...
YOU REAP WHAT YOU SOW! YOU GET OUT OF LIFE EXACTLY WHAT YOU PUT INTO IT! NO MORE AND NO LESS!!
I'D KIND OF LIKE TO SEE A LITTLE MORE MARGIN FOR ERROR!
SCHULZ

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Karma also helps to explain the seeming unfairness of life. Why does a child get hit by a car? Why does a young father die of cancer? Why did that housewife win the lottery ticket? Many Indians answer these kinds of questions by the law of *karma*. When they see a good man suffer, Indians might say: "It's because of some bad deed done in a previous life. Who can escape his *karma?*" Likewise, good *karma* follows a man:

> In dark forests, amidst his foes in war,
> In flood or raging flame;
> In ocean depths or on precarious peaks;
> Slumbering or courting dread danger
> With reckless abandon;

Merits earned in former lives
Afford a man protection.*

Living, for the Hindu, can be seen as an attempt to build up good *karma*. But one builds good *karma* not by "doing good" or helping old ladies across the street but by doing one's duty, one's *dharma*. If you are a son, you obey your father even if it means banishment. If you are a tailor, you bring up your sons to be good tailors. Each person has a *dharma*, determined in part by his position in the family, his caste, and his age. A son obeys; a sweeper cleans the street; a wife bears children. All are human, but each must be faithful to his *dharma*.

But what if you think your *dharma* is wrong? Suppose you think doing your *dharma* will hurt others. The traditional Hindu answer is a story.

Imagine a mighty warrior about to fight in a great battle. On the eve of the conflict, he looks out at the enemy forces and there sees some of his dearest friends, his beloved uncle, his cousins, and even his *guru*. "How can I fight those whom I honor and love? Better I should die. I will not fight." With these words, he throws down his arms and sits despondently near his chariot.

This is the situation in the *Bhagavad Gita*, perhaps the best-loved Hindu sacred text. Arjuna, the brave Pandava warrior, refuses to fight against his cousins, the Kauravas. But Arjuna's charioteer is an incarnation of God, the Lord Krishna. Hearing Arjuna's words, Krishna advises the warrior:

You grieve for those you should not
And yet you talk about wisdom.
The truly taught do not mourn
For the dead or the living.

For to him that is born death is sure
And for him who has died, birth is certain.

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* Barbara Stoler Miller, *Bhartrihari: Poems* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1967), 46.

This cannot be changed. Therefore,
You should not sorrow.

And if you think just of your own place
You should not recoil.
For a warrior there is no better thing
Than to fight out of duty.

Here chance is offering you
A door open to heaven.
O Partha, those warriors are lucky
Who are granted such a fight.

But if you turn away from this battle
Which your own duty requires
Then, giving up duty and glory,
You will only get trouble.

People will talk of your shame
Now and in years to come.
And for one who has been honored
Disgrace is worse than death.

Those in the great chariots will be sure
That you hang back from the battle through fear
And they who once thought well of you
Will come to hold you lightly.

Those who wish you ill will talk of you
And say what had best not be said.
They will revile all that you are.
What could be worse than that?

Either killed, you shall gain heaven
Or conquering, you will enjoy the earth.
Therefore, stand up, son of Kunti
And set your mind upon battle.

Holding pleasure and pain as alike
Gain and loss, victory and defeat
Prepare yourself for the fight
Only thus will you not reap evil.

Better do your own task imperfectly
Than do another's well.

> Better die in your own duty.
> Another's task brings peril.*

Lord Krishna's advice to Arjuna is the model for *dharma* for all Hindus: Do your duty. But there is more to it than that. Think for a minute why *you* act. Why do you study for a test? Why do you tell the truth? Why did you come to school this morning? Why do you obey your parents?

Now put your answers aside and consider these words Krishna says to Arjuna:

> You have a right to the work alone
> But never to its fruits.
> Let not the fruits be your motive . . .
>
> Steadfast in the Way, without attachment,
> Do your work, Victorious One.
> The same in success and misfortune.
> This evenness—that is discipline.†

Your business is with the deed, not with the result. Just do your duty and let the results fall where they may. A fire burns; the flame cannot be concerned about whether it cooks food or destroys lives. Rain falls alike on the "just and the unjust." Do your duty with a "holy indifference for the results." The result may be banishment or a kingdom; these facts do not affect your *dharma*.

Doing your duty with no concern for the fruits of your actions is the way to build up good *karma* and to be born into a higher life in your next incarnation. Violate your *dharma*, seek the fruits of your actions, and you carry the bad *karma* into future lifetimes. Build up enough good *karma* and you will not be born again at all. As Krishna states:

> The wise, whose minds are controlled,
> Leaving the rewards of action,
> Are released from the bounds of rebirth.‡

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* Stanford, *Gita* 2:11, 27, 31–38; 3:35; pp. 14–31.
† *Ibid.* 2:47, 48.
‡ *Ibid.* 2:51.

All Is One: The Hindu Concept of God

The final goal in life for the Hindu is not to be born into a higher station in his next life. The final goal is not to be born again at all. The ultimate result of good *karma* is that a person is reunited with God.

What is the Hindu concept of God? Is it similar to Allah of the Muslims or Yaweh of the Jews or God the Father of the Christians? In the following passage, Krishna describes the nature of God to Arjuna. Remember, Krishna is an incarnation of God, so he speaks of himself. How does this concept of God compare to your own?

I am immortality and death
What is and what is not, Arjuna.

I am the source of all.
All things come forth from me.

I am the beginning and the end
And the middle of all creations
I am the knowledge of the soul.
I am the discourse of those who speak.

I am the gambling of the cheat
The sharp edge of the brilliant.
I am victory. I am effort.
I am courage to the stout-hearted

Understanding, knowledge, non-delusion
Patience, restraint, truth, serenity,
Courage and fear, joy and sorrow,
Rising up and passing away,

Harmlessness, equanimity, content,
Austerity, open-handedness
Fame, ill-fame, however various,
These states of being arise from me alone.

And whatever is the seed of all beings
That I am, Arjuna.

No creature that moves or does not move
Could exist without me.*

Note that Krishna says that he and he alone is the "source of all"—of creation, destruction, fame, ill-fame, love, and hate. The single source is that invisible and subtle essence that pervades all things, which we call God. This God is all that is, and all that is not, as well. It is the ONEness of all reality. To be the ONE, it must combine all opposites within itself.

In the Judeo-Christian tradition and also in Islam, God generally stands for only good qualities, such as love, justice, truth, and peace. Another figure, usually the Devil, is the source of evil: hate, injustice, falsehood, sin, etc. In these religions, one has a choice between God, representing good, and the Devil, representing evil. You either go God's way or the Devil's. Notice the word *or*. The choice is good *or* evil, God *or* the Devil.

In the Hindu concept, however, ultimate reality is *both* rather than *either*. The ONE is both good and evil, both God and the Devil. Destruction is as much a part of the ONE as is creation. Both exist; therefore, they exist in the ONE.

But you and I exist as well. What is our relationship to the ONE? Listen to the way in which a father explains this to his son, Svetaketu, in the *Upanishads:*

> "Place this salt in water and come to me tomorrow morning."
>
> Svetaketu did as he was commanded, and in the morning his father said to him: "Bring me the salt you put into the water last night."
>
> Svetaketu looked into the water, but could not find it, for it had dissolved.
>
> His father then said: "Taste the water from this side. How is it?"
>
> "It is salt."
>
> "Taste it from the middle. How is it?"

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* *Ibid.* 9:19, 10:8, 32, 36, 4, 5, 39.

A young woman performs a puja *(act of worship) to the goddess Lakshmi during the Festival of Lights* (*Diwali*). (Information Service of India, New York, N.Y.)

"It is salt."

"Look for the salt again and come again to me."

The son did so, saying, "I cannot see the salt. I only see water."

His father then said: "In the same way, O my son, you cannot see the Spirit. But in truth he is here."

An invisible and subtle essence is the Spirit of the whole universe. That is Reality. That is Truth. THOU ART THAT.*

Christianity and Islam believe that man stands in relationship to God. He may pray to God, walk with God, perhaps even see and hear God, but he can never *be* God. In the Hindu conception of the ONE, all things *are* God, and therefore man is God too. The ONE is you, it is me, it is ALL.

Yet God is not you. That is why many Hindus, when describing God, speak in negative terms. God is not this, not that, not knowing, not unknowing. What we see and experience is not God, yet God is All.

In talking about God we are like the six blind men disputing the correct description of an elephant that none of us can see. We have mistaken what we can see, touch, smell, hear, and taste for the true and complete reality. This perception that physical phenomena are real Hindus call *maya*. *Maya*, from the same root as the word "magic," means illusion. It is as if the universal reality were playing tricks on us, making us believe that our bodies, this page, the mountains, and the birds are real. In Hinduism, one must go past these material forms to the one divine mystery that envelops and manifests itself as all the little realities. That is the one true reality. *Maya* is simply the mistaken belief that lesser things are real.

Joseph Campbell, a famous scholar of world mythologies, tells the story of a kitten before a mirror who sees what he thinks is another kitten. He stalks it, boxes with it, even rubs noses with it. Finally he peeks behind the mirror and then realizes that he has been reacting to an image. Like the kitten, you and I spend our days loving and fighting things that are ultimately illusionary, according to the theory of *maya*. Even you and I in our separate forms are illusions, say the Hindus, for we are all part of the ONE we call God.

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* Juan Mascaro, *The Upanishads* (Baltimore: Penguin Books, 1965), pp. 117–18.

Seeking Reunion with God: Moksha

Because we live in the world of *maya*, we do not know that we are God. In our daily lives we experience life as separate beings, living, dying and being born again, living, dying and again being born. At some point in his experience, after several lifetimes, or several thousand lifetimes, the Hindu grows weary of living on earth, no matter how pleasant it may be. Swami Ramakrishna, the great Hindu teacher, described the process:

> The world is like a stage, where men perform many parts under various disguises. They do not like to take off the mask, unless they have played for some time. Let them

The interior of the Mangesh Temple, in Goa. (Government of India Tourist Office, New York, N.Y.)

> play for a while, and then they will leave off the mask of their own accord.

Most everyone is still "playing for a while," but if we are Hindus we know that the time will come when we will want to "leave off the mask." When that time does come, we are ready to seek reunion with God (*moksha*). We are ready to seek to realize the Oneness of all things and in this realization to merge with the ONE even as a drop of water joins the ocean.

To experience reunion with the ONE is the goal of the last half of life. Even if you have been a success in this world, life on the wheel of birth and rebirth is not enough.

If wealth which yields all desire is won,
  What then?
If your foot stands on the head of your foes,
  What then?
If honored men are drawn to you by your riches' force,
  What then?
If man's mundane body endures for an aeon,
  What then?*

When a Hindu sees that even if he were to achieve his desires he would still ask, "What then?" he is ready to give up his role as a Householder and seek God. The Laws of Manu give clear instructions for this action:

> When a householder sees his [skin] wrinkled and [his hair] white, and the sons of his sons, then he may resort to the forest. Abandoning all food raised by cultivation and all his belongings, he may depart into the forest, either committing his wife to his sons or accompanied by her.†

Many examples from the history and mythology of India hold up this idea of "going to the forest." The individual personality (the ego) disappears.

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* Miller, *Bhartrihari*, 186 p. 137.

† "Laws of Manu," Chapter VI:2–3, in William H. McNeil and Jean W. Sedlar, *Classical India* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1969), pp. 144–45.

> Once upon a time, in those bright ages when India was young, there lived a great king, Bharata, and so famous was he that even now the people speak among themselves of their country as Bharata Varsha, Bharata's Land; it is only foreigners who talk of it as "India."
>
> In the days of this ruler, it was considered the right thing for every man, when he had finished educating his family—when his daughters were all married, his business affairs in order, and his sons well-established in life—to say farewell to the world and retire to the forest, there to give the remainder of his life to prayer and the thought of God. This was considered to be the duty of all, whatever their station in life, priest and merchant, king and laborer, all alike.
>
> And so in the course of events the great King Bharata, type of the true Hindu sovereign, gave up his wealth and power and withdrew. His family and people woke up one morning, and he was gone. That was all. But everyone understood that . . . he had passed out of the city during the night in the garb of a beggar, and the news spread through the country that his son was king. Just as the water of a lake closes over a stone thrown into it and leaves no trace, so society went on its usual course, and the loss of Bharata made no mark.*

Seeking Oneness with God is still an important dimension of Indian life. In the selection that follows, taken from a modern English novel set in India, a father decides to leave his family and attempt to become a *sannyasi* ("holy man"). Notice that this is after his youngest daughter, Shalini, is married. How does his son Duleep react? His wife? How does this situation compare to retirement in America? How would you react if your father made such a decision?

> Two weeks after Shalini's ritual return to her parents' home, and one week after her final departure to Mayapore with her husband, her father announced his intention to divest himself of all his worldly goods, to depart from

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* Sister Nivedita, *Cradle Tales of Hinduism* (Calcutta: Advaita Ashrama, 1968), p. 253.

his family and his responsibilities, and wander the countryside: become, eventually, *sannyasi.*

"I have done my duty," he said. "It is necessary to recognise that it is finished. It is necessary not to become a burden. Now my duty is to God."

His family were shocked. Duleep pleaded with him but his resolve was unshaken. "When are you leaving us, then?" Duleep asked.

"I shall go in six months' time. It will take until then to order my affairs. The inheritance will be divided equally among the four of you. The house will belong to your elder brother. Your mother must be allowed to live here for as long as she wishes, but your elder brother and his wife will become heads of the household. All will be done as it would be done if I were dead."

Duleep shouted, "You call this good? You call it holy? To leave our mother? To bury yourself alive in *nothing?* To beg your bread when you are rich enough to feed a hundred starving beggars?"

"Rich?" his father asked. "What is rich? Today I have riches. With one stroke of a pen on a document I can rid myself of what you call my riches. But what stroke of a pen or what kind of document will ensure my release from the burden of another lifespan after this? Such a release can only be hoped for, only earned by renouncing all earthly bonds."

Duleep said, "Ah well, yes! How fine! In what way could you be ashamed now to find your son a little burra sahib [gentleman]? What difference could it make to you now what I was or where I was? Is it for this that I gave in to you? Is it to see you shrug me off and walk away from me and my brothers and our mother that I obeyed you?"

"While there is duty there must be obedience. My duty to you is over. Your obedience to me is no longer necessary. You have different obligations now. And I have a duty of still another kind."

"It is monstrous!" Duleep shouted. "Monstrous and cruel and selfish! You have ruined my life. I have sacrificed myself for nothing."

As he had found earlier, it was easier to blame anyone than to blame himself, but he regretted the attack. He suffered greatly at the recollection of it. He tried to speak about it to his mother, but these days she went about her daily tasks dumb and unapproachable. When the time drew near for his father to go he went to him and begged his forgiveness.

"You were always my favorite son," old Kumar admitted. "That was a sin, to feel more warmly toward one than to the others. Better you should have had no ambition. Better you should have been like your brothers. I could not help but exert authority more strongly over the only son who ever seemed ready to defy it. And I was ashamed of my preference. My exertion of authority perhaps went beyond the bounds of reason. A father does not ask his son to forgive him. It is only open to him to bless him and to commit to this son's care that good woman, your mother."

"No," Duleep said, weeping. "That duty is not for me. That is for your eldest son. Don't burden me with that."

"A burden will fall upon the heart most ready to accept it," old Kumar said, and then knelt and touched his youngest son's feet, to humble himself.

Even in the business of becoming *sannyasi* old Kumar seemed determined upon the severest shock to his pride. He underwent no rituals. He did not put on the long gown. On the morning of his departure he appeared in the compound dressed only in a loincloth, carrying a staff and a begging-bowl. Into the bowl his stony-faced wife placed a handful of rice. And then he walked through the gateway and into the road, away from the village.

For a while they followed him, some distance behind. He did not look back. When Duleep and his brothers gave up following him their mother continued. They watched but said nothing to each other, waiting for their mother, who, after a while, sat down on the roadside and stayed there until Duleep joined her, urged her to her feet, and supported her back to the house.

"You must not give in to sorrow," she told him later, lying on her bed in a darkened room from which she had ordered the servants to remove every article of comfort and luxury. "It is the will of God."*

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Paths to the ONE: Yoga

How will the father in the last selection seek union with the ONE? He can choose from among countless paths. Sincerity, dedication, and years of discipline are the only requirements. Perhaps the father will seek reunion with God through *yoga*.

Yoga means "yoking to God" or "union with God." It includes a variety of means that Hindus employ to experience *moksha*, thereby becoming selfless and egoless. It involves total dedication. *Yoga* does not mean improving your personality, finding peace of mind, learning how to do better in business or how to cure headaches. Some of these things may result from the practice of *yoga*, but to say that they are its objective would be like saying that the objective of taking Holy Communion is physical nourishment.

Yoga is a long process, which involves an attitude about life rather than a technique. It generally takes years, perhaps lifetimes, to achieve *moksha*.

There are several kinds of *yoga*. One system is *Raja-yoga* —seeking God through meditation. *Raja-yoga* is the "intentional stopping of the spontaneous activities of the mind-stuff."

Our minds are constantly on the move. Contemplation of one object or idea immediately sets off a chain of other associations and remembrances. As you sit in your seat in the classroom, for example, imagine that you observe through the window a man mowing the grass outside. This mental picture reminds you at once that after school you are supposed to mow the lawn at home. But you had promised to meet Bill at four o'clock to look at a hi-fi set. Thinking of the hi-fi set reminds you of music, the music of the rock festival last summer, and thoughts of the festival set in motion other images of the summer—swimming, playing baseball, the day you got three hits and the crowd cheered. Suddenly someone is calling your name. It is the teacher, and you have not heard. You have lost your concentration on history all because of a man cutting grass outside. Krishna might well have been talking to you when he said: "The mind is restless, Arjuna: it is indeed hard to train. But by constant practice and by freedom from passions the mind in truth can be trained.

The Hindu scriptures liken the mind to a pet monkey. A pet dog can be trained to come when you call him and to leave you alone when you are busy. A monkey, however, comes when *he* wants to. You are usually the monkey's pet. But the mind is not an ordinary mischievous monkey; imagine that this monkey was drunk, and think how difficult it would be to control. Now imagine that this drunken monkey has been bitten by a scorpion. To control the mind, Swami Satchinanda says, is like trying to control a drunken monkey that has been bitten by a scorpion.

Raja-yoga is training to control the mind, to stop its images and associations so that a deeper level of reality may be experienced. The training for the *Raja-yogi* is divided into eight stages:

(1) Self-control (*yama*), the practice of the five moral rules: non-violence, truthfulness, not stealing, chastity, and the avoidance of greed.
(2) Observance (*niyama*), the regular and complete observance of the above five rules.
(3) Posture (*āsana*), sitting in certain postures, difficult without practice, which are thought to be essential to meditation. The most famous of these is *padmāsana*, the "Lotus Position," in which the feet are placed on the opposite thighs, and in which gods and sages are commonly depicted.
(4) Control of the breath(*prāṇāyāma*), whereby the breath is held and the respiration forced into unusual rhythms, which are believed to be of great physical and spiritual value.
(5) Restraint (*pratyāhāra*), whereby the sense organs are trained to take no note of their perceptions.
(6) Steadying the mind (*dhāraṇā*) by concentration on a single object, such as the tip of the nose, the navel, an icon, or a sacred symbol.

(7) Meditation (*dhyana*), when the object of concentration fills the whole mind.
(8) Deep meditation (*samadhi*), when the whole personality is temporarily dissolved.*

Just the first stage of *Raja-yoga* is demanding enough. Notice that posture, what we know as exercises, is number three on the list. It comes only *after* the attainment of the five moral rules. Control of breathing comes after that. It is understandable that an Indian would be skeptical of Americans who practice *yoga* exercises one evening a week.

Meditation is not the only method. *Karma-yoga*, another major system, is based on action. *Karma-yoga* is action without regard for the fruits of one's action. We have already noted that Lord Krishna instructed Arjuna to do his duty without regard for the consequences. To act with a "holy indifference," with no concern for results, is the essence of *karma-yoga*.

This path of *Karma-yoga* is quite different from the *yoga* of meditation, and yet it is just as valid. Many great Indians believe in *Karma-yoga*. Mahatma Gandhi was a believer in *Karma-yoga*. His teachings on nonviolence and his methods of fighting the British through civil disobedience come out of the ancient *Karma-yoga* system.

In *Karma-yoga* there is no withdrawing from life. Life and the world are the stage on which we live out the truth. The "Pure Act" is an important idea in *Karma-yoga*. For example, if you had ten dollars, you might choose to use it in one of four basic ways: (1) You could buy yourself some records; that would be a selfish act. (2) You could give the ten dollars to a needy person and say, "I am helping you. Aren't you thankful to me for my charity?" That would be an egotistical act. (3) You could simply tear the ten-dollar bill into pieces; that would be an absurd act. Finally, (4) you could give the money anonymously to a needy person or worthwhile cause. That would be the pure act and would come close to *Karma-yoga*.

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* Arthur Basham, *The Wonder That Was India* (New York: Grove Press, 1959), p. 326.

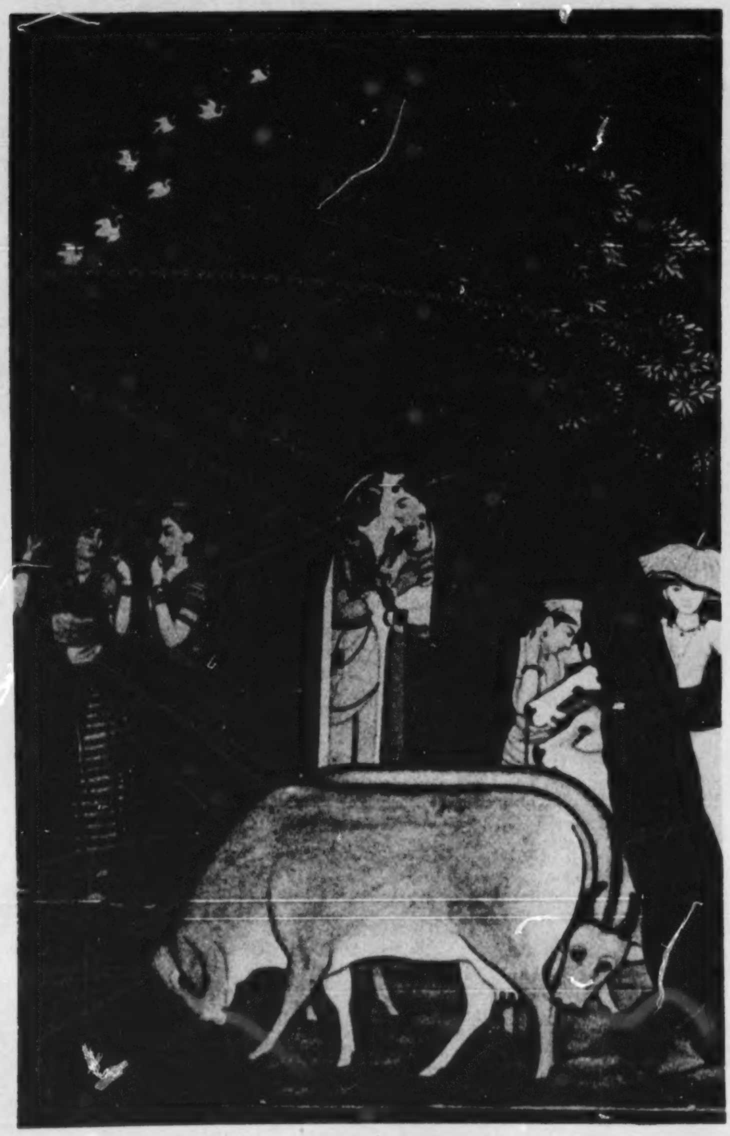
The third major form of *yoga*, perhaps the one most frequently practiced by Hindus, is *Bhakti-yoga*. Here the devotee surrenders completely to God. Of all the *yoga* systems, Bhakti is perhaps the easiest to follow. It does not demand years of meditation, like *Raja-yoga*, or the difficult discipline of *Karma-yoga*. All one has to do is love God with all his being. It is not dissimilar to many Christian practices of surrender to God.

In Hinduism a devotee may choose any one of several manifestations of the ONE. The *Bhakti* path does not require great learning, mastering of the scriptures, or elaborate rituals. One does not even have to be "well born." Lord Krishna states:

> He who works for me, who loves me, whose End Supreme I am, free from attachment to all things, and with love for all creation, he in truth comes to me.
>
> For all those who come to me for shelter, however weak or humble or sinful they may be—women or Vaishyas or Shudras—they all reach the Path supreme.

The deity most often associated with *Bhakti* is Lord Krishna, one of the incarnations of God, who lived for a time as a cowherder with the milkmaids of Brindavan. The milkmaids adored Krishna. Krishna had but to play his flute and the women, even those who were already married, would risk all they held dear—family, home, and honor—to go to his call. Through identification with the milkmaids (*gopis*), the *Bhakti* devotee can love God with all the intensity of the romantic lover. In the following poem about a milkmaid and Krishna, remember that the one addressed is God:

> Let the earth of my body be mixed with the earth
> my beloved walks on.
> Let the fire of my body be the brightness
> in the mirror that reflects his face.
> Let the water of my body join the waters
> of the lotus pool he bathes in.
> Let the breath of my body be air
> lapping his tired limbs.



Lord Krishna and his beloved, Radha, seeking shelter from the rain.
(National Museum, New Delhi)

Let me be sky, and moving through me
that cloud-dark Shyama, my beloved.[*]

Lord Krishna is not the only deity a devotee can choose to worship. Vishnu, Shiva, and Rama are also objects of *Bhakti* worship. In addition, the female deities Lakshmi, Durga, and Kali are common inspirations of *Bhakti* devotion.

Certain *Bhakti* cults have spread all over the world. There are Krishna cults in several American and European cities. Devotees dance and pass out literature on the streets. Every year hundreds of Americans and Europeans travel to India in search of their own special *guru*. The Beatles and film actress Mia Farrow are among those who have made these pilgrimages. Rennie Davis, a former radical political activist and one of the founders of Students for a Democratic Society, has become a devotee of Maharaja-Ji, the young religious leader. Some Indian *gurus*, such as Maharishi Yogi and Maharaja-Ji, have visited the United States.

Bhakti-yoga is often associated with saints who, through their poetry, songs, and way of life, helped to bring people to the love of God. All through Indian history such saints roamed the land, inspiring devotion to God. Many of these saints are in India today. Some are regarded by Indians as crackpots who appeal to Western seekers but who are not genuine holy men. Some, like Sai Baba in South India, perform miracles and have large followings of Indians and Westerners. Only time and the people can ultimately say who are authentic and who are fakes.

Whether they seek a spiritual *guru* or not, whether they follow one *yoga* or another, for Hindus, release from the constant round of birth and rebirth is the ultimate aim of life. Mahatma Gandhi put it in these words:

> What I want to achieve—what I have been striving and

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[*] "The Messenger Speaks" from *In Praise of Krishna*, translated by Edward C. Dimock, Jr., and Denise Levertov. Copyright © 1967 by the Asia Society, Inc. Reprinted by permission of Doubleday & Company, Inc.

pining to achieve these thirty years—is self-realization, to see God face to face, to attain *moksha*. I live and move and have my being in pursuit of this goal. All that I do by way of speaking and writing, and all my ventures in the political field, are directed to this same end.*

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* Mahatma Gandhi, quoted in Krishnalal Shridharani, *The Mahatma and the World* (New York: Duell, Sloan & Pearce, 1949), p. xiii.

"Lower the Body to the Ground": Death

Editors' Introduction: Death is never easy to cope with; yet we know that it is the ultimate reality. One goal of all religions is to help man deal with his mortality.

It has been said, "As a man lives, so shall he die." What does this mean? Does it mean that our attitude toward life will determine our attitude toward death? Perhaps. Or it might be put in another way: In a man's attitude toward death, we can gain insight into his attitude toward the meaning of life.

It may be possible, then, to infer the philosophy of a society from its handling of death.

What does the American way of death tell us about our philosophy of life? What does the silk-lined, thousand-dollar coffin tell us about our acceptance of mortality? How is the corpse treated? Why is the hairdresser called in to help the mortician prepare the body? Why do visitors to the funeral parlor sometimes say, "Oh, doesn't she look lovely?" In brief, what does our handling of death suggest about our attitudes toward death and ultimately toward life?

The following selection, taken from the autobiography of a Punjabi businessman, describes the burial of Savitri, a young

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Prakash Tandon, *Punjabi Century 1857–1947* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968), pp. 148–52. Originally published by the University of California Press; reprinted by permission of The Regents of the University of California.

Indian woman who has died in childbirth. In general, how does Indian society's reaction to death compare to American society's? What does the Indian funeral tell you about Indian philosophy? To what extent is the funeral consistent with the concepts of *samsara* and *moksha*?

WHEN THE DOCTOR realized that further effort was no use, he whispered to my mother the dreaded Hindu formula, "I think the girl should now be lowered onto the floor." Helped by others, she lifted Savitri from the bed and put her on the floor, which had been hastily plastered with water and some cowdung. . . . A few drops of water from the sacred Mother Ganga [the Ganges River] were put into her mouth, and the aromatic leaf of the holy Tulsi plant, which is grown in a pot in every Hindu home, was placed between her lips. Slowly life was leaving Savitri's body, burning with the heat of the fever, her baby lying already lifeless near her. A small lamp made out of dough, with melted ghee [oil] and a cotton wick, was put near her. As life would stop flickering in one body it would symbolically rise in a tiny flame in another. The soul would soar up and perhaps somewhere enter another body, till, purified of all sin, it would rise and merge into Nirvan [*moksha*], to be reborn no more. Who knows, my mother thought, where Savitri's soul was first born, and whether she was its last home. Had it finished its eternal quest, or would it continue the search for peace? Whatever its past or future, whether it stopped here or continued, in its sojourn, through Savitri's body, innocent and sinless, it could only have gone upward to a higher existence. It could only have gained a step nearer to Nirvan. . . .

As Savitri had no sons, my elder brother was chosen to perform certain ceremonies. He was bathed, Raja shaved his head, and he was put into a new, unwashed raw silk *dhoṭi* [draped clothing] and had to sit by the oil lamp in a corner of the room. The lamp had to be kept filled with mustard oil to keep it burning for ten days until all the ceremonies were over. Food would be served to him first and brought to him to eat near the lamp. As a mere boy, my brother was somewhat frightened by the role he was called upon to play. He must have thought of the happier role he had played as uncle's *sarbhala* when he rode behind him on the horse on our way to Savitri's house for the wedding. . . .

As the news spread, members of our *biradari* [caste brotherhood] began to drop in. As they passed through the street our neighbors joined them. . . . Our elders stood at the door, and as visitors came with folded hands and said, "Very much grieved, how much we cannot say," they replied with their hands stretched out in a gesture of infinity, "God's will." The elderly callers touched Dwarka Prashad [Savitri's husband] on the shoulder and said, "Son, have patience, there is no alternative but to accept God's will with fortitude. Bear the loss like a man, it will give courage to everyone else, especially to her mother and father."

One member of the *biradari* always came forward on these occasions and offered to make all the arrangements for the funeral rites. . . .

These were the moments when the *biradari* came into its own. Everything would be taken off the hands of the bereaved family, and without fuss, very quietly, everything would be taken care of. It was a great feeling for the family, a feeling of importance, of belonging and affection, to be waited on in their grief. With smooth and experienced efficiency, the men and women divided up their tasks, and someone took over-all direction. One person ran to the post office to send the letters and telegrams; another went to buy materials for the ceremonies—incense, ghee, *mouli* and rice; another went to buy new unstitched cloth for the shroud, and handwoven red, purple or magenta cotton or silk for covering; another to buy flowers; another to buy bamboo sticks, some fagots of sandalwood, a mat woven from date-palm fronds, some string, an earthenware pitcher and bowl. A large variety of materials was needed for the coffin and the cremation. In villages a handcart would go round, and the *biradari* members would each give an unsplit log of wood as their contribution for the funeral pyre. . . .

[Inside the women prepared Savitri's body. It was then taken downstairs and placed on a bamboo mat bier.] Men came forward and lifted the bier and moved on. While passing through our *mohalla* [cluster of houses around a common courtyard] they held it low so that the neighbors and others waiting in the street could take a last look. At the end of the street they covered her face, lifted the bier on their shoulders, and started at a brisk pace. Every few steps another mourner

A Hindu worker looks on as a dead body burns on its funeral pyre. (United Press International) would join the carriers out of duty and piety. It was considered a blessing to carry it. To the monotonous chant of "Ram Nam Sat hai," ("God's name is truth"), sprinkling water with a tuft of kusha grass, throwing coins in the air over the body for the poor to pick up, the procession moved on through the streets till it reached the cremation grounds. . . .

Some people had arrived earlier to arrange the funeral pyre. The big and heavy logs were placed at the bottom, then the smaller ones; the still smaller logs formed rests for head and feet. Three iron bars were stuck in the ground on each side to prevent the logs from rolling off the pyre. The body was placed on the logs and covered with a few pieces of sandalwood and then smaller logs with some big ones on top again. A bundle of dried twigs and reeds was made into a small pillow and pushed between the logs under her head. Incense and ghee were then poured all over the pyre.

When everything was ready, some elders led Dwarka Prashad to the final and the most painful act. Everyone fell back and left him and the *acharya* [a brahmin associated with death ceremonies] sitting near the pyre. The *acharya* recited some last *mantras* [prayers] and lit a torch of dried reeds, which he handed over to Dwarka Prashad, and then walked away.

Dwarka Prashad stood alone, staring vacantly at the pyre. Between the logs he could see the still form of Savitri, which he had learned to know so well. He saw the shape of her head, the curve of her breasts and her thighs, and her feet pointing up. In deep youthful sleep he had sometimes seen her lying on her back under a bedsheet, as still as she was now. As intimacy grew he had seen her whole body lying expectantly vibrant, but now she looked so relaxed. He felt the growing heat of the torch but he stood still. His feet would not move. As the torch burst into a fierce flame and he still would not move, granduncle came forward and put his hand under his elbow and led him close to the pyre. "Dwarka Prashad," he whispered hoarsely, "this is something which only you must do."

There was a little smoke from the pillow of dry grass, a crackle, and then a small tongue of flame leapt and licked the red silk shawl. It grew into a fire which spread to the dry logs. Fed by incense and ghee, as it rushed through the pyre, the fire raged and flames leaped high. The mourners fell back as the intense flames consumed everything in their way. "Let us now go," said granduncle.

Editors' Postscript: Will this soul escape the "endless" cycle of birth-death-rebirth? Nobody knows. Some rare souls, who follow their *dharma* perfectly and ultimately renounce this world and experience the ONE, are released from the bonds of *samsara*. But for most people, the cycle of life continues, and in some household a joyous young mother sings out:

> Husband, call the midwife quickly,
> Let the child be delivered.